

GARDENING GUIDE 01

Starting a Raised Bed

A first-timer's guide to building, filling, and planting a 4×8 raised bed in a Kansas City backyard.

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Why a raised bed

A raised bed gives you control over soil quality, drainage, and weeds — the three things new gardeners struggle with most. It also puts the garden at a comfortable working height and defines the space so it doesn't feel overwhelming.

For most Kansas City yards, a single 4×8-foot bed produces enough vegetables to feed a household of four through the growing season, with plenty to share.

What you need

- Six 8-foot cedar or untreated pine 2×10 boards (two full length, four cut to 4 feet)
- One box of 3-inch exterior deck screws
- A drill with a driver bit
- One roll of landscape fabric or a stack of flattened cardboard
- About 32 cubic feet of soil mix (see recipe below)

Choosing the site

Pick the sunniest spot in your yard — vegetables need six to eight hours of direct sun. Avoid low spots that pool water after a storm. Give yourself at least three feet of walking room around every side of the bed.

Building the frame

Lay two 8-foot boards parallel, 4 feet apart. Place the 4-foot boards between them at each end so the corners form a rectangle with the 8-footers on the outside. Drive three screws through each corner. Flip the whole box, stack the second course on top, and screw the corners together again. Your bed is now 20 inches tall — deep enough for carrots, potatoes, and every leafy green.

The soil recipe

Fill the bed with roughly one-third compost, one-third topsoil, and one-third coarse-textured material like coco coir, aged pine fines, or leaf mold. Local sources in KC include Missouri Organic and Suburban Lawn & Garden.

Rule of thumb

A 4×8×20-inch bed holds about 32 cubic feet. Order 1.5 cubic yards to fill it with a little to spare.

Your first planting

In April, plant lettuce, spinach, radishes, and peas. In mid-May, add tomatoes, peppers, basil, and cucumbers. In August, replant lettuce and add kale, chard, garlic, and carrots for a fall harvest.

Watering

New beds need water every day for the first two weeks, then two to three deep waterings per week. A soaker hose on a \$15 mechanical timer removes the guesswork.