

Gardens are multifunctional - They grow food, they are community spaces, and they are fertile ground for trying new things.

Garden beds serve as simple experiments in the garden, where we can test different relationships of soil, water, and plants. There must be hundreds of variations of garden beds, from ancient terraced landscapes to modern hydroponics, but for starters, here are 10 different garden beds we are learning from in our gardens.

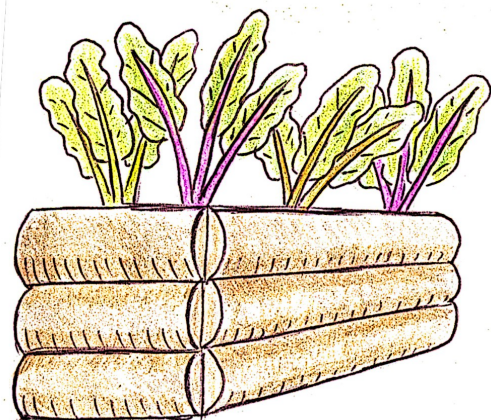
Let us know what you try and how it goes.

Raised Beds

Try gardening standing up! Raised Beds are great for people who have trouble bending over. We built ours out of wood from the lumberyard scrap pile. Just build boxes, any size you want, and then fill them up with layers of organic matter.

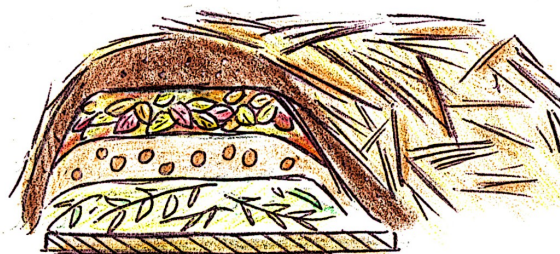
To fill the space, we put in big things near the bottom, like rotting logs and brush. Then we covered it with layers of woodchips, soil, manure, compost, and leaves. Finally we put 12 inches of soil mixed with a bit of compost on top and planted it!

The structures will eventually rot, and by that time the organic matter inside will break down into tons of rich soil for more beds!



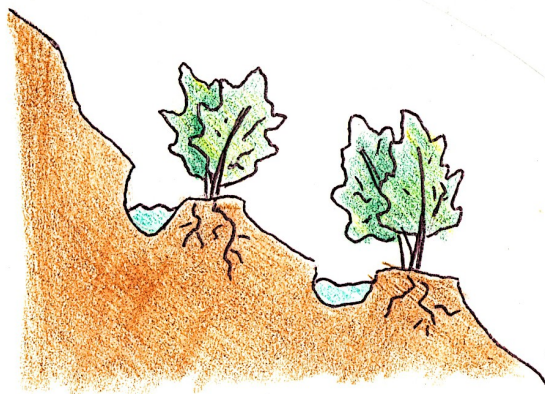
Lasagna Beds

These are simply beds made of layers of organic matter. First we put down cardboard, which will kill the weeds and grass. On top of it we put a 6 inch layer or so of brush, then manure, leaves, compost and then soil. We plant in the soil and then cover around the seeds or seedlings with straw as mulch. Over a season the layers will break down into each other and make great soil for many seasons. For the first season its best to plant shallow rooting veggies so that they do not get an overdose of the raw ingredients inside the bed.



Swales

Swales are a cool way to make garden beds on hills. The beds and paths are oriented perpendicular to the slope of the hill. The paths are dug down about 1 foot and the soil mounded up on the downhill side. This creates an undulating slope of paths and beds, where the paths will collect water and feed it to the soil under the beds. The idea is to prevent rain from just running down the hill without penetrating the soil. You can fill the depressed paths with woodchips.

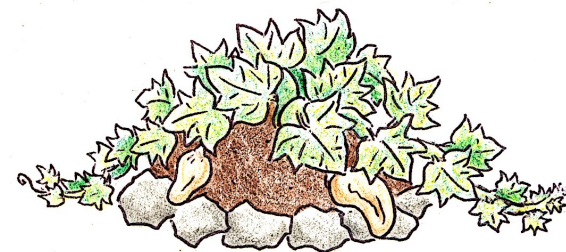


Double Dug Beds

Our best way to loosen up compact soil, but also the most physically intensive bed to make. Dig two feet deep and mix in compost all the way through. This will give root vegetables the opportunity to stretch their roots deep down. Double digging once should benefit a bed for years and does not need to be redone. Tilling activates soil organisms so it is good to plant right away after digging. Continual tilling will deplete nutrients. So we double dig new beds and then add organic material without digging again year after year.

Squash Mounds

One of the easiest types of bed to make. It is simply a pile of loose dirt. Squash and pumpkin plants spread out as they grow. We build mounds of soil 4 feet apart, about 1 foot tall and 2 feet diameter, and plant 2-3 squash plants in each. This gives them space to spread and room for you to carefully walk between. Squash are also tolerate moderate shade, so these types of bed are nice for someone who doesn't have an extremely sunny patch of land. Placing rocks around the edges can help retain heat during cool years.



Hugelkultur

This is a combination of the raised bed and lasagna bed. It is for building soil in your garden bed. First dig a ditch. Then fill it with rotting logs, brush, sticks and leaves. Cover the whole thing and the crevices with soil and plant. Over years the layers will break down into better soil, and the bottom layers will help hold water for the bed.

3 Sisters

This is the practice of planting beans, corn, and squash together. We make mounds and put 2 squash seeds in the middle, 4 corn seeds around them, and 6 beans around the edge. The corn shades the squash and the beans add nitrogen to the soil, which the corn and squash plants need. Traditionally pole beans have been used in this combination with the idea that they will climb up the corn. However, we found that unless you get a rare variety bred specifically for climbing corn that the beans will actually pull the corn over. For that reason, we recommend using bush beans instead, which work just as well.

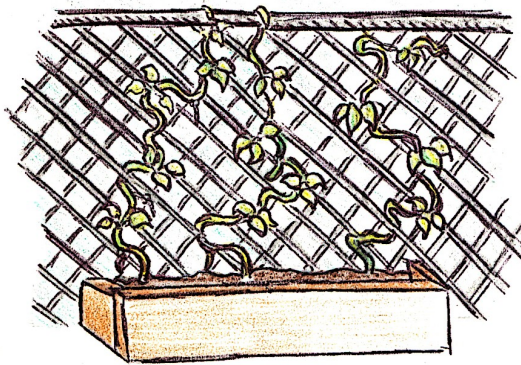


Tilled Soil

You can simply till in a bit of manure or compost into a normal patch of land about 6 inches to 1 foot deep and plant that season. If you're tilling a lawn, don't forget to turn patches of grass upside down so that the grass dies off and doesn't become a weed.

Climbers

Beans, Peas, Squash, Melons, Cucumbers, even Tomatoes will reach out with vines and arms and try to grab onto things. Provide these climbers with strong supports and they will grow more upright, healthier, and be easier to harvest and take care of. We build supports out of wood, metal, rope, anything, and then gently place the plant's vines on them or loosely tie them to the supports. Setting up trellises also saves space in your garden. Our favorite technique is to cover the whole fence with climbing beans or peas.



Buckets

You can simply grow a lot of food in buckets or tubs. Make sure to give the plants enough space and to make holes for water to drain in the bottom of the buckets. Buckets can even help keep rabbits from your little seedlings. And they can be anywhere – rooftops, patios, driveways, and fire escapes.

Don't forget to water them.

GARDEN BEDS

FOR BEGINNERS

