

This is an excerpt from the book

Classic Garden Structures

by Jan & Michael Gertley

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RAISED BED



Gardening in raised beds has so many advantages that it's difficult to name many disadvantages. The simple yet elegant lines of this Raised Bed will help you grow a variety of plants and at the same time visually enhance your landscape. Raised beds are ideal for gardeners living in regions of poor soil. Filled with a combination of topsoil, compost, aged manure, and peat moss, a raised bed will produce lush crops of flowers and vegetables. The improved raised soil will drain freely and warm quickly in the spring for earlier planting.

Raised beds can also be used as mini-nurseries where newly rooted cuttings can grow until they're ready for transplanting to their permanent positions in the garden. Similarly, you can grow new varieties in a raised bed so you can observe their growth habits and colors before strategically placing them in a coordinated landscape.

Enhance the growth of flowers and vegetables in this attractive Raised Bed.

RAISED BED MATERIALS LIST

Key	Qty.	Description	Finished Dimensions	Material
A	4	Corner posts	3½ in. x 3½ in. x 24 in.	Cedar
B	2	Upper side frame boards	1½ in. x 5½ in. x 78 in.	Cedar
C	2	Lower side frame boards	1½ in. x 5½ in. x 78 in.	Cedar
D	2	Upper end frame boards	1½ in. x 5½ in. x 54 in.	Cedar
E	2	Lower end frame boards	1½ in. x 5½ in. x 54 in.	Cedar
F	8	Tie boards	¾ in. x 1½ in. x 9 in.	Cedar
G	16	Lag screws	¼ in. x 5 in.	Galvanized
H	16	Dowel plugs	¾ in. x ½ in.	Hardwood
I	16	Washers	¼ in. (I.D.)	Galvanized
J	32	Wood screws	#8 x 2 in.	Galvanized

Although advantages far outweigh the disadvantages, it's worth mentioning that the plants in your raised bed may need extra water due to the free-draining soil. Also, if your region experiences extremely cold weather, the elevated soil may freeze sooner and to a greater depth.

Depending on your needs, you can build one raised bed or several. If you construct more than one, reduce weeds and early spring mud by installing permanent paths between the beds. Materials such as gravel, bark chips, and paving stones work well. The narrow design of this raised bed allows easy access to the entire growing area, and its sturdy construction will give years of enjoyment.

While raised beds are a fairly common sight in backyard gardens, we wanted to design a raised bed that added a little more architectural detail to

the basic frame. Another goal was to minimize the “cupping” of the perimeter boards that plagues many of the raised beds we have seen. To do this, we cut two “plough” grooves in two adjacent faces of each post to accept the perimeter frame boards. These grooves (a type of open mortise) prevent the 2x6 frame boards from cupping due to moisture. The corner posts also have a shallow pointed top and a circumference groove to add interest.

1 After cutting all the boards to size, begin by making the shallow end points on the tops of the four corner posts (A). To do this, set the miter gauge on your table saw to make a 30° cut and pass each corner post through the saw four times. The blade should contact the end of the post in the very middle, cutting at an angle toward the side of the post (see the illustration on the facing page).

2 After you have cut the top points, set the sawblade to a height of $\frac{1}{2}$ in. and cut the $\frac{1}{2}$ -in.-wide circumference groove around each post, starting the groove 4 in. from the top of the post. Unless you use a dado blade set to cut a width of $\frac{1}{2}$ in., you will need to make four or five passes through the saw for each side.

3 To finish shaping the end posts, make the two plough grooves on two adjacent sides of each post. These grooves will accept the side and end frame boards and will help prevent them from cupping. Pencil mark the position of each plough groove before you begin (see the illustration at right). Then, using a $1\frac{1}{2}$ -in. wood drill bit, drill a hole $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter and $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep. The top of this hole is $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. below the bottom edge of the circumference groove, or 6 in. from the top of the post.

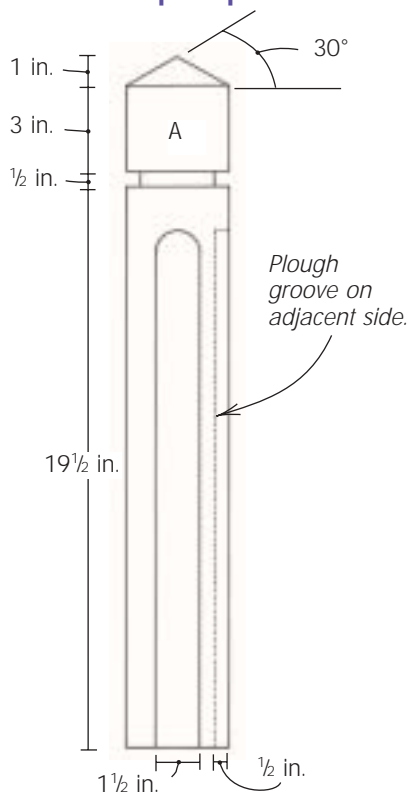
Make two additional holes just below and overlapping the top one, then chisel away the triangular remnants of wood that remain between the holes. You should be left with an elongated oval hole that is $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep. This elongated hole enables you to use your table saw to complete the plough groove.

With your sawblade still set to a height of $\frac{1}{2}$ in., move the rip fence 1 in. from the sawblade. Starting at the bottom of the post, pass the post through the blade until the blade reaches the bottom hole that was drilled. Be careful not to push the post too far or the sawblade may contact the area above the top hole. Repeat this step several times, moving the rip fence away from the blade in $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. increments until the entire plough groove has been cut. Create the grooves in the remaining three posts in the same way.



Decorative end posts keep the side walls of the Raised Bed straight and well anchored.

Raised Bed end post profile



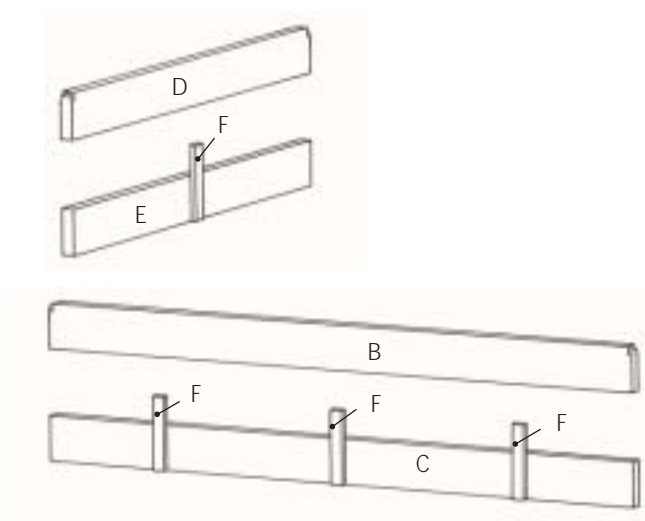
4 Next, build the side and end frame sections by combining two boards for each side section (see the illustration at left below). The top 2x6 boards (B, D) on each side are notched and shaped to match the top of the plough groove on the post. To do this, cut the notch with a backsaw and shape the tenon with a chisel. When the frame sections are inserted into the plough grooves, it leaves a nice clean joint at the top of each junction.

5 When all of the top frame boards are complete, combine them with the two lower side and end frame boards (C, E) using the 9-in. tie boards (F). Attach each tie with four wood screws (J), two screws in each frame board (see the illustration at right below). These ties won't show once you fill the raised bed with dirt.

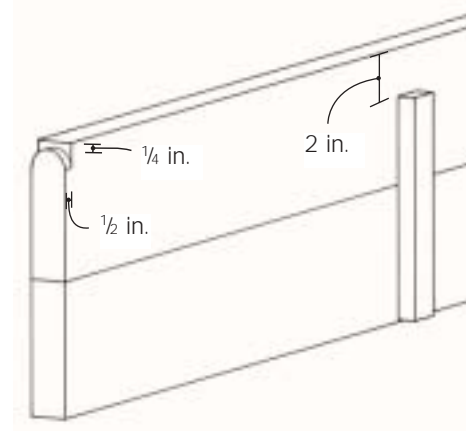
6 Before attaching the frame sections to the posts, apply any stain or preservative/sealer you may want to use. Since the raised bed will likely be used for vegetable crops, read the label on the can to make sure the finish is nontoxic when completely cured.

7 Assemble the raised bed frame by attaching two end posts to both ends of the two side frame sections (see the top illustration on the facing page). On the outside edge of each post, opposite the side frame sections, drill two $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. holes about 1 in. deep, as shown in the bottom illustration on the facing page. Slightly offset these holes from the middle of each board. Then, in the center of each hole, drill a $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. pilot hole that is about $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep from the surface of the post for the 5-in. lag screws (G). Slip a washer (I) onto each lag screw and install them into each pilot hole. When you're finished, all four corner posts should be attached to either end of the side frame sections.

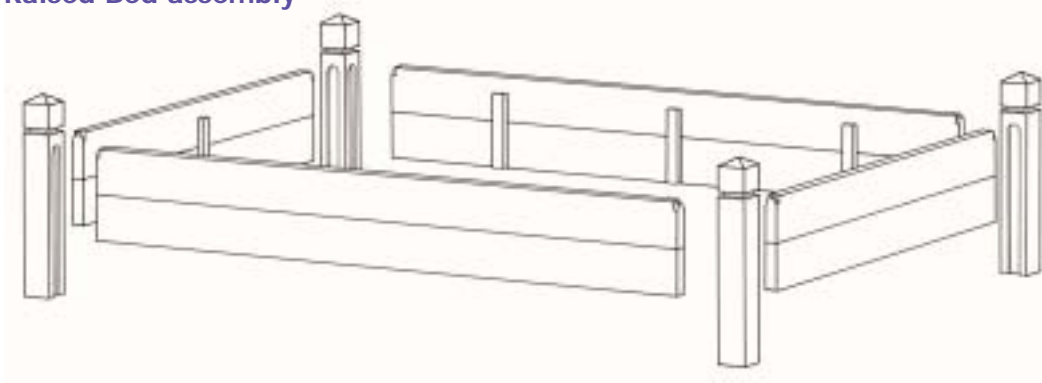
Raised Bed side and end wall assembly



Closeup of Raised Bed wall construction



Raised Bed assembly

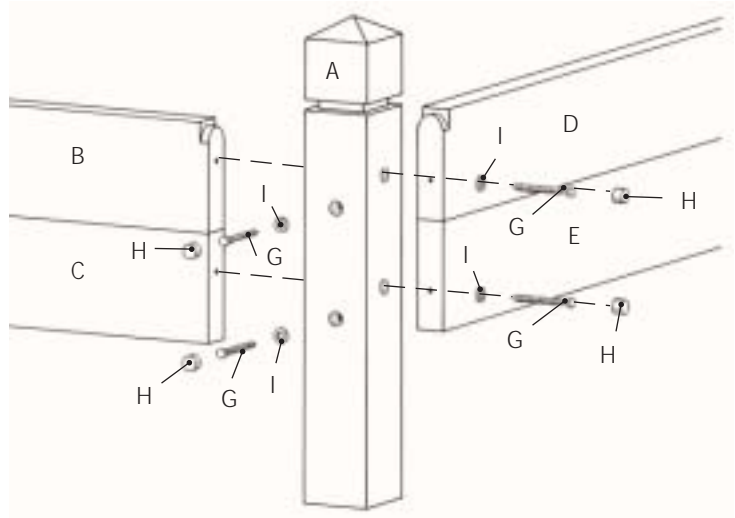


8 Repeat these same steps to secure the end frame sections to the same four posts. Once the raised bed is assembled, cut 16 dowel plugs (H) from a length of $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. hardwood dowel. With a little glue, insert these plugs into the four holes on each corner post until they are flush with the surface.

9 When you move the raised bed to your desired site in the garden, mark the ground where the four posts sit, then set the raised bed aside. At each mark, excavate holes about 7 in. deep, then set the raised bed back in place with the posts sitting in the holes. Level the raised bed by adding dirt to the holes if necessary. By putting the corner posts partially in the ground, the raised bed is sturdier and less prone to being pushed out of shape.

If you have applied a finish to the wood, make sure it sits empty for a week or two to ensure that it has cured. Then fill the bed with a good mixture of soil, peat moss, aged manure, and other amendments you may deem necessary. The only thing left to do is to fill it with your favorite flowers or vegetables in the spring!

Raised Bed lag screw attachment



Raised beds are perfect for growing vegetables, flowers, newly rooted cuttings, and biennials that will be transplanted to your garden the following year.