



Constructing garden beds

What are my options?

There's a lot of ways to make your own garden beds. What you decide to do depends on what you want from your garden, and the space and sunlight you have. You can use an existing patch of grass, a run-down garden bed or a patch of concrete. You can use raised beds, or even grow upwards. Whichever way you go, you'll be rewarded by the freshest, tastiest produce available anywhere.

No-Dig gardens

Dig It! Or don't! No-Dig gardens are perfect for lazy gardeners and will give you great results!

No-Dig gardens let the worms do the work, leave your soil intact, and the layered organic matter makes rich, fertile soil. These gardens follow natural systems of growth and decay. As the micro-organisms in the soil are left undisturbed, the soil underneath will gradually improve with time.

No-dig gardens are easily made following a few simple steps:

- If building over concrete, first place a 10cm layer of dry branches to allow air circulation. If building over a lawn, first closely crop grass.
- Then cover with overlapped layers of cardboard or newspaper to a thickness of at least 5mm. Soak each layer in water before laying down.
- Next place thick pads of straw over this (pea straw is best).

- Add some manure.
- Then top with 20cm of loose straw and some more manure...*keep adding the straw and manure layers to the height you want...*
- Plants can either be grown in a 10cm layer of compost, or in isolated pockets of compost.
- Top with a mulch layer of straw.

It's best to start off your No-Dig garden with seedlings. Seeds, root veggies and legumes will do better in the garden's second season when the layers have started to break down producing more soil. Over time as the layers break down (and the worms do the digging for you!), you will need to top up the layers of your No-Dig garden.

If you'd like more defined garden beds you can buy beds ready-made, or make your own from recycled materials. A good general rule is to make your soil one foot deeper than the deepest roots of the plants you want to grow. If you want your bed to be higher than that, use clean gravel or even polystyrene at the bottom of the bed. Irrigation pipe can also be added to facilitate watering.

Wicking beds

A wicking bed is designed so plants are watered from the roots up. This is a great system to assist plants get through a hot summer, or infrequent watering.

Wicking gardens are made in layers. How many and what they are exactly depends a lot on the size of the garden (a small pot won't need as much engineering as a large bed). Do some research into what will work best for you before you go ahead – there's a lot of instructions online.

An example wicking bed could consist of:

- A barrier at the base between the garden and any surrounding soil.
- A reservoir of water on top of this.
- Followed by a layer of geocloth or weedmat.
- Then a wicking layer, which contains a medium that will help water move up to the soil (sand is a good example).
- Another layer of geocloth or weedmat (you want your wicking medium to stay clean or it will silt up and stop working).
- Topped with soil for growing your plants.
- A pipe that runs through the layers from the top of the garden, opening into the reservoir. This pipe will need to be above the level of soil and will need a cover to keep it clean. This is where you will water the garden. 25mm pvc pipe works well.
- An outlet pipe. This will allow any excess water to drain from your bed (such as after heavy rain) and will let you know when your reservoir is full.

Vertical gardens

Vertical gardens are great if you have a shady garden and a sunny wall, or a small space like a balcony. There are many ways to grow upwards!

Stackable pots are made so that when the top pot is watered, the water runs down through all of them.

You can attach a number of pots to your wall. Make sure you attach them well, as they can be heavy when full of wet soil and plants.

Hanging baskets attached to hooks on the wall are another way to grow upwards. They work really well with tomatoes and strawberries.

Vertical tube gardens: these can be bought commercially but are easy to make yourself. Just get a piece of plastic pipe, like drainage pipe, drill holes large enough for the plant to grow from into the sides, and cap the bottom if you'll hang it vertically, or both ends if you'll hang it horizontally (if you use them horizontally, you can hang a number of them in rows). Fill with potting mix, plant into the holes, hang it up and admire your work. Running seep hose (attached to your garden hose) through the middle of the pipe will assist with watering.

Vertical tube gardens are great for strawberries as it's difficult for snails and slugs to get to them.

Used pallets: Make sure they're the heat-treated variety. Staple weed mat over the back and three sides of the pallet. Mount the pallet, fill with potting mix and plant your veggies. Water well, and top up again with your potting mix.



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