

How to Grow Plants in a Raised Bed

Here at www.gardeningwithchildren.co.uk we are huge fans of [raised beds](#) and we have designed a good selection for you to choose from.

Raised beds are perfect for children and have many advantages over gardening directly into the ground. Cultivation is raised a little off the ground so this is perfect for little ones, and for the adults there is generally much less bending to do.

Also with clearly marked boundaries between the growing area and pathways children can easily avoid trampling on the crops, which can be a bit of a problem on open plots. And with less trampling the soil suffers far less from compaction. Raised beds are also great for gardens with poor soil, as good topsoil can be placed in the raised bed above the original ground level.

We have a large selection of raised beds available, some of which are specifically tailored to the needs of children and can be viewed via our [Garden Shop](#).

Equipment

- [A selection of plants or seeds](#)
- [Raised Beds](#)
- [Crop protection fleece, netting, plastic bottles etc](#)
- [Watering can](#)
- [Hand forks and trowels, hoe, pitch fork](#)
- [Wooden compost bin](#)
- [Leaf mould compost bin](#)
- [Green hands leaf collector](#)

Crop Rotation

The idea behind crop rotation is to plan to use different parts of the growing area for different families of vegetables each year. The families or groups of vegetables are then rotated from one area to the next over a cycle of around 3 or 4 years or more if possible.

This helps with soil fertility as different types of vegetables take different nutrients from the soil and some plants such as peas and beans actually improve soil fertility. Also by rotating where the crops grow each year it helps to prevent the build up of diseases such as club root, in the soil.

If you have several raised beds, each bed could be used for a different group of vegetables. If you have less space however, the rotation can be done in different areas within the same bed.

So first put together a list of the vegetables you would like to grow then put them into groups. A suggested set of groups is listed here.

Beans & Peas

Includes peas, mange touts, runner beans, dwarf beans, broad beans



Brassicas

Includes, cabbages, Brussel sprouts, broccoli, kale, cauliflower

Roots

Includes potatoes, carrots, turnips and parsnips

Onions

Includes, onions, leeks, garlic and shallots

Cucurbids

Includes cucumber, marrows, courgettes and pumpkins

Salad Crops

Includes lettuces, rocket, lambs lettuce, sorrel and chicory

Allocate each group to a section of the growing area. Small salad crops and spring onions can be intercropped with other groups if necessary. Also make a note of what is being grown where and this will assist when planning the crop rotation in future years.

Using the Space

When setting your seeds or positioning your plants make sure you allow sufficient space for them to grow. In a raised bed system it is ideal if all the growing area can be put to productive use, but if plants are sown too close together they will struggle to grow to a decent size. It is best to check the seed packets or a gardening book for advice on the spacing of individual crops.

In a raised bed system there is no need to leave space to walk between the rows of plants. All the crops should be reasonably accessible from the edge of the bed. Also walkways become compacted and are a growing space for weeds, so plan to distribute the plants evenly across the growing area.

For more advice on sowing plants from seed see our fact sheet – How to grow plants from seed

Controlling Weeds

Because there is generally less space between the plants in a raised bed, there should be less weeding to do. Most weeding can be done by hand or with a hoe. The use of surface mulch can also reduce weed growth.

Crop Protection

Covering the plants can assist in protecting them from harsh weather and a lot of pests. Lightweight fleece and fine netting can be laid over the crops for protection and some of our raised beds come with raised corner posts to make attaching crop protection easy.



Placing plastic bottles over young plants can also protect them from harsh weather, slugs, birds etc.

Watering

It is best to water plants at dawn or dusk when the sun is less strong and there is likely to be less evaporation. Watering requirements will vary from one crop type to another so it is important to tailor the watering to individual plant needs. Covering the soil with mulch will help to prevent it from drying out.

Improving the Soil

Adding compost is an excellent way of increasing the amount of organic material in the soil. This is important for improving drainage and structure in heavy soils and increasing the water holding capacity in lighter soils. See our fact sheet - How to make your own compost for more information about this and take a look at our excellent range of [wooden compost bins](#).

Leaf mould is an excellent soil improver. Firstly collect some autumn leaves. Using our [green hands leaf collector](#) will make this job a lot easier. Then stack them in a [leaf mould compost bin](#). They can then be stored for use during the following year.

If you have a raised bed that is empty for a while it can be sown with a fast maturing crop, which can then be dug into the soil after around 8 weeks from sowing. This acts as a green manure and will improve both the organic matter content and nitrogen levels in the soil. Plants typically used for green manure include borage, mustard and red clover. It is important to cut the crop and dig it into the soil before it has chance to flower or set seed.

Animal manures can boost soil fertility. Store them or add to a compost heap to allow them to decompose before using.

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