

Garden Bed Types

Advantages and Disadvantages

In-Ground Beds	Raised Beds	Containers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Garden beds dug directly in the ground level with the soil surface. There may be a visible edge or physical border, but the soil surface is not significantly higher than surrounding areas. This system relies mainly on the existing soil, although amendments such as compost or other fertilizers may be added to improve the soil. Typically these beds are no more than 3 feet wide so students can easily reach into the middle of them to work the soil, weed, or harvest without stepping in them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essentially in-ground beds with a significantly raised edge or border. This allows the soil in the bed to be built up or improved soil to be brought in and added above the existing soil. Strictly speaking “raised beds” do not have a solid bottom, although structures with wood borders and solid bottoms are often referred to as such. Borders are made from materials such as redwood, plastic lumber, cinder block, broken blocks of salvaged concrete (“urbanite”), or logs. Avoid using railroad ties or pressure-treated woods—both contain materials toxic to humans. Raised beds are generally no more than 3 feet wide so that students can reach into the middle without stepping in them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Containers are varying sizes and differ from raised beds in that they have bottoms. Planting containers need drainage holes and should be made from materials that hold up well when wet and left outdoors. Ceramic, recycled plastic, and other types of plastic containers are available at nursery centers. Other cast-off containers can work well so use your imagination (old bathtubs, sinks, wheelbarrows). Large plants such a tomatoes or squash should be grown in larger containers that can hold over 4 gallons of soil. Smaller containers are suitable for shallow-rooted crops such as lettuce, spinach, onions, strawberries and herbs. Containers require a “light” planting mix rather than soil. You may make your own: 1/3 compost, 1/3 coco pith, and 1/3 horticultural sand.
<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little requirement for materials to start. No building materials, no imported soil. Easy to expand or change the layout of your garden. With a decent soil, these are very easy to dig and prepare. Makes good use of the vast resource of water and nutrients provided and stored in the existing soil. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs a site with workable, uncontaminated soil. May be difficult to install gopher wire so that it is effective. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be good in areas with poor soil. They create clear bed borders and add definition to garden design. Can be made wheelchair accessible. Other users may find the higher soil surface level more convenient to work as well. Edges can be designed as seating areas. Possible to install gopher wire to bottom edge of frame before filling with soil. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires found and/or purchased materials to construct the edges. Can be costly. May require purchased soil or soil moved from another area. Edges can make digging and preparing the soil more awkward. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be used on top of asphalt or where there is no soil. Location is relatively flexible. They can be strategically placed to beautify school grounds. Tall containers can be wheelchair accessible. Small containers or containers on wheels can be moved inside to protect from weather or vandalism. Good for areas with limited space. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires initial cost of container and/or purchased materials to construct the containers. Can be costly. Requires special soil mix that must be purchased or made from purchased ingredients. Containers need to be watered and fertilized more often than in-ground beds.