

Cultivate Your Own Oasis: A Guide to Setting Up a Raised Bed Veg & Herb Garden in Small UK Spaces

Here in the UK, where gardens are often compact and weather unpredictable, raised bed gardening offers a smart solution for growing fresh vegetables and aromatic herbs. Perfect for patios, courtyards or tiny backyards, raised beds maximize space, improve soil & drainage if necessary, and bring gardening within reach—literally. Here's how to create your own thriving edible garden, even in the smallest of spaces.

Why Raised Beds?

- Superior Drainage: Ideal for our wet, rainy climate, raised beds prevent waterlogging.
- Soil Control: Tailor soil to your plants' needs, avoiding heavy clay or sandy soils common in parts of the UK.
- Space Efficiency: Grow more in less space with strategic planting.
- Accessibility: Less bending—raised beds make gardening more accessible.

Choosing Your Spot

- Sunlight: Aim for a spot with 6+ hours of sunlight daily. South-facing areas are ideal.
- Shelter: Position away from wind tunnels; use fences or trellises as windbreaks.
- Flat Ground: Ensure stability and even water distribution.

Building Your Raised Bed

- Materials: Use untreated, rot-resistant wood (e.g., cedar) or recycled plastic. Avoid railway sleepers as they may have been treated with tar or toxic creosote.
- Size: Opt for 1.2m x 1.2m beds—wide enough for plants, narrow enough to reach the centre.
- Height: 30cm suits most veggies; go taller (45cm) for deep-rooted plants like potatoes.
- Assembly: Secure corners with screws or metal brackets. Line the base with landscape fabric to deter weeds.

Many UK garden centres and online retailers sell affordable raised bed kits if you cannot make your own.

Soil: The Foundation of Success

- Mix: Combine 60% topsoil, 30% compost (use good quality peat-free to protect peat bogs), and 10% grit or sand for drainage.
- Enrich: If available incorporate well-rotted manure or leaf mould for nutrients.
- Drainage Layer: Add a 5cm gravel layer at the base if your area floods.

Cultivate Your Own Oasis: A Guide to Setting Up a Raised Bed Veg & Herb Garden in Small UK Spaces

Choosing Plants for Small Spaces

Vegetables:

- Quick Crops: Radishes, lettuce, spinach. Grow loose leaf lettuces as they can be harvested “a leaf at a time”, picking what you need & leave the plant to grow.
- Compact Varieties: Dwarf French beans, ‘Patio Pride’ peas, round carrots.
- Vertical Growers: Climbing cucumbers or runner beans (add a trellis).

Herbs:

- Sun-Lovers: Plant low growing herbs such as thyme at the bed’s edge and taller growing herbs towards the middle or back. Winter Savory is an attractive perennial with stronger taste to the annual Summer Savory making it a perfect addition.
- Partial Shade: Parsley, mint (bury mint in pots to prevent them taking over).
- Annuals: Basil, coriander.

Companion Planting: Pair marigolds with tomatoes to deter pests or grow garlic near plants susceptible to aphids.

Planting Tips

- Succession Planting: eg after harvesting spinach in spring plant kale for winter.
- Vertical Space: Use obelisks or canes for peas or beans. After harvesting cut the stems back leaving the roots in the ground as they will supply nitrogen to the soil.

Herb Garden Hacks

1. Perennial Herbs: Plant rosemary, thyme, and sage once—they’ll return yearly.
2. Containers: Use pots within the bed for invasive herbs (mint) or to rearrange seasonally.
3. Harvesting: Snip herbs regularly to encourage bushy growth. Dry surplus for winter.
4. Site near the kitchen door if space allows for ease of picking.

Maintenance Made Easy

- Mulch with straw to retain moisture.
- Feeding: Use organic seaweed feed every 4–6 weeks.
- Pest Control: Cover beds with netting to deter cabbage moths. Encourage ladybirds with calendula flowers.
- Winter Care: Protect beds with cloches or horticultural fleece in frosty weather.

Cultivate Your Own Oasis: A Guide to Setting Up a Raised Bed Veg & Herb Garden in Small UK Spaces

Final Thoughts

A raised bed garden transforms even a postage-stamp plot into a productive haven. Start with one bed, experiment with herbs and veggies you love, and soon you'll be savouring homegrown salads and garnishes. Whether you're in a city flat with a balcony or a cottage with a compact yard, raised beds bring the joy of gardening - and fresh flavours - to your doorstep.

