

Ample Rains Showcase Benefits of Raised Beds

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

Citrus can be grown successfully in the home landscape with minimal effort. Not only will you love their incredible fragrance when in bloom, it's much fun to watch them grow and to share your homegrown citrus with friends and family. A presentation on FAQs on growing citrus in the home garden will be provided by Monte Nesbitt on Thursday, November 19, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park.

To a gardener, rain is generally a welcome blessing. Rainfall and plants are usually a match made in heaven. However, where rainfall is concerned, sometimes there can be too much of a good thing. El Niño has certainly helped to fuel ample rains over our Gulf Coast growing region this fall. Growing vegetables in the ground is challenging. So what is a home gardener

to do about soggy soils that do not dry out between the rains? As with many challenges, the best defense is a good offense.

I usually make the case for constructing raised beds during late winter well before the spring gardening seasons starts in earnest. However, given the prolonged conditions of excessive soil moisture over the fall

season, now is an ideal time to promote the benefits of raised beds. Remember this: Raised beds can be the solution to excessive soil moisture issues, plus a number of other challenges, when it comes to home vegetable gardens. Raised beds drain faster during periods of heavy rain. Overall, raised beds are easier to maintain than traditional in-



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ground beds. And with careful management, they can be even more productive than typical garden beds.

As a result, the use of raised beds is becoming increasingly popular in home vegetable gardening. It's also a great way to garden with kids.

Raised beds are generally about 8 to 12 inches high but may be higher. Raised beds built up high enough so you can sit on the edge while you garden are particularly easy on the back. They can allow gardeners with physical limitations or those that can no longer bend over easily to continue gardening.

Generally, the width of a raised bed should be no wider than you can comfortably reach into the middle when standing just outside the bed or sitting on the edge. For most adults, a bed 3 to 4 feet wide is best. The length of the bed is up to you.

You should be able to plant, weed, and harvest while staying outside the bed and reaching in. This allows you to avoid walking in the bed once it is planted.

You may construct the sides of the raised bed with a variety of materials, such as landscape timbers, bricks, cinder blocks, plastic lumber, rot-resistant wood like cedar and redwood, or pressure-treated lumber (2-by-8-inch or 2-by-12-inch boards work well).

In our coastal climate, wood rot and termites are real concerns.

Even rot-resistant wood can succumb to these problems. Using materials such as pressure-treated wood, plastic lumber and cinder blocks will create a more permanent raised bed.

Once constructed, raised beds will need to be filled with soil. Before adding the new soil, kill or remove any grass or weeds present in the bottom area of the raised bed. The herbicide glyphosate – the active ingredient in Killzall, Eraser, Roundup and other brands – may be used to do this.

Till the soil in the bottom of the raised bed, add a few inches of organic matter and work that in before filling the bed with soil. The roots of the vegetables may grow down into the existing soil at the bottom of the bed, particularly if the raised bed is less than 12 inches deep. This creates a transition that helps the roots grow deeper. If tilling is impractical, you can simply put the soil mix in over the existing soil after the weeds are dead.

You can purchase a blended soil mix, often called garden soil or vegetable soil, from a local soil company or nursery. The soil company or nursery can help you decide how much soil you need based on the dimensions of the raised beds. It is noteworthy to mention new soils often get better with age, and gardeners will talk about purchased soil mixes "mellowing" over the first six to eight months after they

are put in place.

The soil level should be a couple of inches below the edge of the sides. This facilitates watering. And remember, to leave space for the mulch you will use to cover the soil.

If you have been thinking of starting a vegetable garden but were put off by the hard work of bed preparation, building raised beds is an option. This is an advantage for both older gardeners and young children who would find the physical demands of preparing in-ground beds challenging.

At a Glance

WHAT: The Most Frequently Asked Questions on Growing Citrus

WHEN: Thursday, November 19, 2015

TIME: 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

TOPICS: Texas A&M Extension Program Specialist Monte Nesbitt will provide a PowerPoint presentation on the most frequently asked questions regarding home citrus production.

LOCATION: Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St. in La Marque). Pre-register by e-mail (GALV3@wt.net) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 5065).

