Steve Thorpe Gardening
Contract and maintenance work
Working in Schools, businesses and the Community.

50 Prince Street, Haworth, Keighley, West Yorkshire, BD22 8JD
Telephone: (01535) 647496 Mobile: 07969658743
E Mail: gardening@steve-thorpe.co.uk

Making wooden raised beds

There are many benefits to using raised growing areas when starting up and developing your vegetable growing area.

Firstly it is an ideal height for primary school aged pupils to work from and it ensures that their first experience of gardening is an enjoyable one.

The trouble with gardening with beds on the ground with younger children is that they can easily become over faced with the rate at which the weeds grow, especially during the holiday periods.

At Haworth Primary School we have a rectangle bed on the ground with the raised beds surrounding it. This gives the children a taste of both worlds. The growing area is on quite a difficult gradient so the raised beds are ideal. They also enable schools that only have hard standing areas to start up a growing project.

You also find that you do not have as much trouble with slugs and snails with raised beds and any pests that do reach your crops are at a much more accessible height for the birds. It also seems to be a good height to miss the carrot and onion fly which are always a nightmare for all gardeners.

The raised growing areas are also ideal for planning your crop rotation scheme, which is very important when starting up your project. If you grow the same crop in the same piece of land

year after year you can get a build up of one particular pest or disease that a certain crop is prone to. By using a crop rotation scheme you avoid this build up.

Different crops take certain nutrients and elements from the soil. By planting the same crop year after year your soil can become barren. By rotating the crops you can plan a manageable cycle to suit every crop's needs.

The raised beds can be made out of many different materials- stones, railway sleepers or in our case treated wood.

I usually get the children building the wooden raised beds with parents or teachers as this gives them ownership of the project from the very start and it is also so much fun. I am a great believer that children need hands on experience of life skills and that there is a safe way of doing everything.

To start off with you need to decide how big a bed and what shape a bed you want to make. This can depend on the area or corner that it is going into.

I usually find that a 1.8 x 1.2m is quite a good size.

The wood I use is 5 inch wide by 1 inch thick. It is important to get treated wood as this will withstand the bad weather that we are certain to encounter in this country. You will need 6x 24 inch long by 2 inch wide pointed pegs for the corners and strengtheners in the middle of the planter.

For one planter you will need the following timber:-

10 x 1.8 metre lengths
10 x 1.2 metre lengths
6 x 24inch long by 2inch x 2 inch wide pointed pegs.

I fasten the planters together with 2 ½ inch flat head nails, 100 for each planter.

The total cost for one planter is usually about £30 which makes it accessible and affordable for most schools.

I know they are then to fill with soil which takes about 1 ½ tonnes but once full you have a beautiful depth and an ideal bed for growing cops such as carrots and parsnips.

Place 2 of the 24 inch long pegs on the ground, fasten a length of the 1.2 metre wood to each topside of the post.

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Before you nail the other 4 1.2 metre lengths onto the posts to form one side of the planter measure down at intervals to make sure you have the same distance between the pegs all the way down.

Repeat this process to form the other side of the planter.

You then need to stand both sides of the planter on level ground and line up a 1.8 metre length of wood at the top corner of each side.

Once you have got the first length nailed on make sure you have the same distance all the way down the pegs before you nail the next four lengths on as you did with the sides.

Repeat this process with the other side.

All you need to do now is nail the other 2 24 inch long posts at the middle of each length to act as a strengthener.

You will be left with a planter with 6 pointed pegs which are ideal for knocking down into soft ground.

If you are placing your planter on hard ground you need to saw off the 6 posts.

Timber available from www.taylortimber.co.uk

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