

Raised Beds: Measure the Space Before You Buy the Bed

A bed is only one part of the project. Plan access, water and the soil bill before choosing its height or placing an order.

Walk the site first

Watch the site through the day and record sunlight. Check hose reach and how water drains after rain. Mark the proposed footprint with string, then walk around it carrying a watering can or garden tool. Leave usable paths and make sure you can reach the middle without stepping into the growing area.

Choose height for a reason

A taller bed may improve access, but it also increases the amount of fill and the cost. Decide whether you need extra growing depth, easier reach or simply a defined planting area. Consider the soil beneath an open-bottom bed. A bed on paving behaves differently from one connected to usable garden soil.

Calculate the fill

For a rectangular bed, multiply inside length $\times$ width $\times$ filled depth, all in feet. A 4 $\times$ 8 foot bed filled 1 foot deep needs about 32 cubic feet, or 1.19 cubic yards. At 2 feet of filled depth, that doubles to 64 cubic feet. These are geometric estimates before settling; use the actual internal shape and dimensions for modular or curved beds.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Ask the soil supplier better questions

Ask what the mix contains, whether there are recent test results and how it is intended to be used. Do not fill with pure compost by default. Compost can contribute excessive nutrients or salts when overused. Choose a mix suited to an open-bottom bed or a container as appropriate. Test existing soil before deciding which amendments it needs.

Finish before planting

Check assembly, exposed edges, drainage and access. Water the fill, allow settling and adjust the level before planting. Set supports where they belong. Avoid turning a bed installation into an impulse purchase of more plants than the finished space can accommodate.

Your purchase worksheet

Write down: internal dimensions; filled depth; calculated volume; soil delivery cost; path width; hose reach; support cost; first two crops. Compare the complete project cost, not just the advertised bed price.

Your next step

What will you do first? Write one action and a date, then record what happened.

Action: _____

Date: _____ Result: _____

Sources and more guides

[University of Minnesota: Raised-bed gardens](#)

[University of Maryland: Soil to fill raised beds](#)

[University of Minnesota: Too much compost and manure](#)

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Use local planting guidance and the variety instructions for your conditions. This is an editorial planning guide from Best Garden Channel.