

His Raised Beds Grow As Compost Added

Bill Walker's raised garden beds keep rising as he adds compost to them each year. Although he has some lower beds, it's the ones with 2-ft. high sides that grab the eye, all 38 of them.

"The idea is that when they get full, I won't have to hardly bend over," explains Walker.

Walker picked up a load of treated 2-in. lumber for a low price a few years ago. Ever since, he has been building the raised bed sidewalls in his shop and hauling them to the garden site with his tractor and loader. He has 20, 24-ft. long beds and 18, 36-ft. beds.

He used a variety of 2 by 6's, 2 by 8's, 2 by 10's and even some 2 by 12's for the walls with 2 by 4's for uprights. Once he has them in place, he pounds in sharpened 2 by 4's as retainers and bolts them to the walls as well.

The beds are all about 4 ft. wide, allowing him to reach the center from either side. Paths are 3 to 4 ft. wide, spaced just right for the use of cattle panel plant supports. He centers ends of 16-ft. cattle panels in neighboring beds and pounds in stakes made from treated 2 by 4's sharpened at one end.

Tomatoes, pole beans and cucumbers climb up and over. Each fall he removes the panels and 2 by 4's, sprays them with a bleach solution, and stores them.

Walker uses electric fence to keep critters out of his garden and especially the sweet

corn. Last summer he went one better.

"I borrowed a hunting dog from a friend and let him roam the garden area. He kept the sweet corn safe, even from squirrels," says Walker.

Making compost is a year-long project. Walker starts out each fall with piles of leaves collected from his lawn, lawn clippings, cow manure and, if he can find it, rotted hay.

"I get cow manure and sawdust bedding from a friend with a dairy farm," says Walker. "I use my loader to build the pile with alternating layers of leaves, grass, manure and hay as high as my loader will lift to dump."

Sweet corn takes up many of the beds, as does garlic. Walker plants hundreds of cloves each fall. Once the plants mature, he braids the stalks and hangs them to dry, keeping some for replanting.

Walker and his wife make gallons of what he calls V-6 juice. They cook down a mixture of tomatoes, celery, hot and sweet peppers, garlic and onions. Then they strain it for juice; the pulp they use like salsa.

The bulk of the produce is given away to anyone who needs it. Walker says being able to give food away makes all the work worthwhile.

"The Bible says to care for the widows and orphans," he says. "It feels so good to give



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the vegetables away."

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Paths between beds are 3 ft. wide, spaced just right for the use of cattle panel plant supports.

Back-Saving Raised Garden Beds

"My back was badly injured in an accident last year and I needed to find a way to garden without bending over. So I came up with a new approach using treated lumber and blemished steel roofing," says Harold Gallaher, Farmington, Mo.

He recently sent FARM SHOW photos of 2 raised gardens he built that are 30 in. tall — much taller than conventional 6 to 12-in. tall raised gardens.

Each bed measures 16 ft. long by 4 ft. wide and 30 in. tall. The bottom is lined with galvanized chicken wire to keep moles out. The bed is filled with topsoil enriched with compost. Cross braces inside the bed are covered with scrap sheet metal to minimize soil contact with the treated lumber.

After building the wooden frame, Gallaher boxed it in with sheets of blemished metal roofing that he got from a local supplier. Only the white back side of the metal is visible.

Vertical wooden posts on each side of the bed support a shade cover made from a 16-ft. wire cattle panel that's topped with plastic lattice. It provides about 60 percent shade. The lattice attaches to the cattle panel with nylon wire ties.

The cover is held in place by a pair of 8-in. long spikes that fit into slightly oversized holes drilled into the posts in 8-in. increments. One hole is spaced 1 in. above the other, so that one of the spikes fits below the cover and the other fits above it. "To raise or lower the cover, I simply change the position of the spikes. The spikes on top of the covers prevent wind uplift," says Gallaher.

Another cattle panel arched between the 2 beds forms a trellis for cucumbers and other climbing plants.

The only non-treated lumber used was the 2 by 6 top lip that will be in contact with the gardener during use. This board will be easily replaced when it eventually rots away.

"I'm really happy with how it turned out," says Gallaher. "The shade provided by the lattice allows my lettuce to keep growing even in the hottest part of the summer. In dry weather I put a soaker hose on top of the lattice to form a cool, soft rain for the plants."

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Raised garden beds are 30 in. tall. Vertical wooden posts on each side of bed support a shade cover, made from a 16-ft. wire cattle panel that's topped with plastic lattice.

"Truck Tire" Tomato Garden

"It's the best way to grow tomatoes that I've ever found," says Roman Barvinchack, Greencastle, Penn., who raises 6-ft. tall tomatoes inside big truck tires that he buries in sod.

Barvinchack grows tomatoes, green beans, onions and other crops on 3/4 of an acre. The idea behind his system is to dig a 2-ft. deep hole and replace most of the original heavy clay soil with a mixture that includes sand, compost, horse manure and pulverized limestone. The soil mixture is filled up above the bottom bead of a full-sized truck tire with an inside diameter of 24 in. A 1/2-in. thick layer of crushed stones is added at the bottom of the hole to improve drainage. The tire is used to contain the soil and keep weeds out and water in.

Cages made from concrete reinforcing wire support the tomatoes. The tires are set flush

with the ground and spaced about 4 ft. apart, with nothing but grass between them.

"I've been using this system for 3 years and couldn't be happier with it. My tomatoes get all the water and fertilizer they need, and they're up off the ground so insects and disease problems are minimal," says Barvinchack. "A big advantage is that I can mow right around the truck tires without having to do any trimming or weeding."

In the early spring, the tires heat up during the day and provide warmth at night, says Barvinchack. "I wrap clear plastic around the reinforcing wire about 24 in. high and leave it there until the middle of June or until the tomatoes push out the top."

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