



Raised Bed Gardens

One thing that tastes outstanding in the summer is fresh food from the garden, like a fresh sliced tomato or some fresh herbs diced up and thrown into a recipe. It can be healthier for you and possibly create a connection with future generations. More and more people are now growing their own vegetables, herbs and flowers at home. What better way to get off cellular devices and into nature?

Many landscape contractors often offer services to help complete the task and some even maintain the crops. I researched Nashville Foodscapes and think they have a clever approach of introducing vegetables and herbs into the landscape. Check out Nashvillefoodscapes.com for a lot of cool ideas.

There are several ways to start. It could be in the form of pots, raised beds or in a portion of an existing planting bed. First, choose the area for containers, raised bed or an existing plant bed. Just remember the best spot to raise produce will need about eight hours of summer sun per day. The recommended depth of planting should be about 10 - 12 inches deep. The soil composition should be approximately 60% top soil, 30% compost and 10% peat moss, perlite or vermiculite (via www.compostcompany.com). In doing raised beds, it's a good idea to install a tight wire mesh at the bottom to prevent digging pests from plucking your produce.

Very popular plants for raised beds are tomatoes, pepper, squashes and corn. Some people like the simplicity of salad greens and herbs. There are also the root crops which include potatoes, carrots, turnips and radishes. Some plantings such as tomatoes, peas, etc., require systems such as a wire basket or poles to support the plantings.

Pros for doing a raised/container garden are: you have more control of the soil structure, absence of rock, good drainage, less erosion, easier access and maintenance because it's higher off the ground, you can plant earlier in the year so you have an extended season. The raised beds also prevent tree root zones from being disturbed. Additionally, it's a great way to teach kids where food comes from, not to mention that this food is better for you. It also benefits nature: bees in pollination and other microorganisms for the soil. With a container garden or raised bed, there inevitably will be failures, but there will also be successes, and the benefits are so rewarding.

It is encouraging and exciting to see the interest in citizens growing produce and sharing with neighbors. Who knows, we may find some common areas to plant food together! It is proven that this makes for a stronger community. It is wonderful to show and share this process with the younger generation, show them the importance of where their food comes from and the health benefits it provides. It's not too late - get outside and grow something!

-- Gavin Duke, Society of Ceres committee member

