



LAWN &
GARDEN

The Mendota Reporter
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How and why to build a raised garden bed this season

(StatePoint) Fairly easy to construct and even easier to maintain, raised garden beds are a great way to raise plants and vegetables in the comfort and convenience of your backyard.

Here are some of the top insights and tips about the ins and outs of raised garden beds.

- Why use raised garden beds? A raised garden bed can help facilitate the ideal growing environment, as most people don't have that perfect soil naturally in their yard. Their accessibility makes them easier to work in and maintain. Plus, they're a nice architectural design element in any landscape.

- What's the ideal size? The main rule of the thumb applies to width. The bed should be no wider than 4 feet, as you never want to compact the soil when working. Length however, is based on personal preference and needs. As far as height is concerned, you want the roots to be able to grow out and down as much as possible -- 6-inches at minimum. While 12-inches is common, anything higher is a bonus.

- What materials work



Raised garden beds create visual interest and an ideal growing environment.

best? Treated lumber is the most readily available and economical material and will likely last the longest, however, some people prefer untreated hardwood, as

it lasts almost as long and doesn't contain chemicals. Other materials you have around the home and yard, such as rocks, old tubs, etc., can work too.

- Where's the best location? Build your raised garden bed on level ground, in full sun exposure near a water supply.

DIY Instructions:

To build a 10-foot x 4-foot x 18-inch raised bed, you'll need:

- Nine 6-inch x 6-inch x 12-foot cedar timbers
- Tape measure, t-square and marking pencil
- A saw and extension cord
- One box of 10-inch heavy-duty exterior wood screws
- Ten 24-inch x 1/2-inch rebar stakes
- Twenty 10-inch galvanized timber spikes
- Sledgehammer
- Impact drill and long drill bit
- Level
- Hammer

A raised garden bed can help facilitate the ideal growing environment, as most people don't have that perfect soil naturally in their yard.

- Shovels
 - Hardware cloth, wire cutters and fence staples
 - Work gloves, safety glasses and ear plugs
 - Wheelbarrow (to transport soil)
1. Begin by cutting six, 6 x 6 timbers, each measuring 10-feet 6-inches in length. And six, 6 x 6 timbers, each measuring 4-feet 6-inches in length. Drill rebar holes in each timber.
 2. Once the first layer of bed has been placed, leveled and squared in your desired location, fasten the corners using 10-inch wood screws. Secure the entire layer to

the ground with 10 pieces of rebar.

3. Place the second layer of timbers, staggering the corners and fastening them with wood screws. Secure this layer to the first with ten 10-inch galvanized spikes.

4. Install galvanized cloth to prevent burrowing pests from eating earthworms and destroying plants.

5. Place the third layer of timbers (following above directions.)

6. Fill with soil and plants.

For an amazing crop this season, build a raised garden bed for best results.

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Keep an eye out for jumping worms this gardening season

URBANA—After a long winter, Illinois gardeners are eager for the new growing season. While doing the usual preparations and tasks, home gardeners should be aware of an invasive species wriggling across the Midwest—the jumping worm.

Jumping worms are non-native earthworms that can be easily spread by humans, but there are steps gardeners can take to reduce risks. Also known as Alabama jumpers, crazy worms, or snake worms, this invasive species is named for its unique, active movements. First discovered in Illinois in 2015, the pest now has been confirmed in 23 counties across the state.

“In the past, we’d hear from gardeners concerned with spreading or bringing home fungal or viral diseases, but now the top concern is jumping worms,” says Richard Hentschel, a horticulture educator with University of Illinois Extension.

Jumping worms often are found in the leaf litter or mulch layer, or in the top 3 to 4 inches of soil in wooded areas, garden beds, and lawns. Once established, jumping worms can damage plant roots, lawns, or ornamental gardens.

Illinois Extension forestry research specialist Chris Evans says the worms are voracious eaters that decrease soil quality and reduce organic matter.

“As the worms feed, they alter the soil by increasing aggregate size, creating larger clumps with more space in between,” Evans says. “This is caused by their castings making up a higher and higher percentage of the soil.”

Over time, the soil begins to look like coffee grounds. Since this sign is delayed and the worm’s microscopic eggs



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can survive Illinois winters, gardeners may unknowingly have them or spread them.

While the worms have a huge impact on the fragile forest soil profile of Illinois forests, effects to the garden or yard can be addressed.

“This is not a ‘sound the alarm and panic’ situation, but it is one to keep an eye out for and know about,” Evans says. “Jumping worms do not disperse very fast on their own. It is human-aided spread that can be an issue.”

Gardeners can help by using heat-treated commercial compost or mulch; cleaning off equipment and shoes, especially if working at multiple garden sites; and not sharing home compost, mulch, or plants.

“Dividing perennial plants is a good gardening

practice,” says Hentschel. “However, sharing those perennials with neighbors or donating them to plant sales may not be the best thing to do now.”

Before transplanting in the same yard, Evans suggests gardeners remove soil and wash plant roots to prevent spreading eggs. It is still safe to purchase plants from garden centers or catalogs or those that are started from seed and grown in pots, he says.

Adult worms can be removed when found, usually from June to the first freeze. Jumping worms are larger than other earthworms, about 4 to 8 inches long, with glossy skin and a more rigid, stiff structure. They thrash when touched or disturbed, giving them their unique

nicknames. Residents may see them on pavement and sidewalks after a heavy rain with other worm species.

The main identifying feature is the clitellum, or band, which is smooth, not raised, and completely circles the body. Often it is a milky white color starting at the 14th segment, earlier than other species. The public can

submit a photo of a worm for identification to their local Extension office, which can be found at go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice.

“If you have jumping worms, these mitigation efforts are needed, along with fertilization and mulching to

maintain organic matter for plant health,” says Evans. “Realistically, it is going to be hard to get rid of an active population until research provides better practices to manage them.”

This does not mean gardeners need to abandon their yard projects or find a new hobby. Hentschel says they should continue to grow, divide, and enjoy the many wonderful blooms and harvests throughout the season.

“Just keep an extra eye out for jumping worms, and stay safe by keeping your plants, mulch, and compost in your own yard.”

Illinois counties confirmed with jumping worms are:

Northern: Jo Daviess, Winnebago, McHenry, Lake, DeKalb, Kendall, Kane, DuPage, Cook, and Will

Central: Peoria, Woodford, McLean, Champaign, and Sangamon

Southern: Madison, Perry, Jackson, Williamson, Johnson, Pope, White, and Gallatin

Hentschel and Evans both say there are likely more counties with the pest that have not been officially confirmed. Learn more about how to identify and report jumping worms using a fact sheet found at go.illinois.edu/JumpingWorms2021.

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Brighten and boost your outdoor space with ease by planting petunias and pansies

(BPT) - Gardening is the perfect way to revitalize your home, enhance your mood and safely spend time outdoors with your family. Sun-petunias and pansies are two great choices for adding high-impact, low maintenance flowers throughout your favorite outdoor spaces, from large yards to balcony gardens. With a few creative ideas and easy suggestions, you'll help your plants thrive so you can enjoy stunning color month after month.

Whether you're a new or advanced gardener, use these tips for planting long-lasting flowers in both traditional and unique ways:

Enjoy flowers up, down and all around

Pansies and petunias are two timeless plants that are available in an array of

fun colors so you can add visual interest throughout your sunny outdoor spaces. Get creative by making your own flower-filled hanging baskets or create interesting designs and patterns in flower beds. You can even add vertical appeal to spaces by up-cycling a hanging shoe organizer, filling each pouch halfway with soil and adding petunias. With their dramatic spread, exceptionally long bloom time and weather resistance, petunias brighten up gardens, patios and balconies with bold color - and they're virtually care-free.

Use heartier plants for early spring gardening

As days grow longer and the weather becomes milder, you're ready to dig into the dirt. However, since spring can be unpredictable, you want to make sure your

flowers can handle the cooler temperatures. Not only do pansies withstand the cooler temperatures, but they're also easy to grow and maintain, making them a great choice for beginner and seasoned gardeners alike. Available in many colors, you can get creative with flowers as soon as the seasons change. Plant these in early spring and enjoy the cheery feel they add to any garden for months to come.

Colorful fun beyond the garden

In addition to beautifying your outdoor spaces, pansies are a simple way to enhance any DIY project. These elegant flowers make a stunning edible garnish for charcuterie boards, fruit platters, salads or cocktails. Want to elevate ice cubes? Add colorful pansies to the

tray before freezing. You can also press pansies to dry for use in arts and crafts, such as creating beautiful bookmarks, colorful cardstock or a one-of-a-kind phone case.

Brighten baskets with on-trend yellow blooms

A warm yellow color called "Illuminating" is a 2021 Pantone Color of the Year, a tone that conveys joy and hopefulness. Taking

inspiration from this on-trend shade, you can add a dash of inspiration to your garden. These petunias add sunny bursts of color to flower baskets or window boxes. Additionally, these fast-growing plants bloom freely all season without much maintenance. You can enjoy these happy yellow flowers as seasons turn because they tolerate both

heat and cooler conditions well.

Gardening is a low-stress healthy hobby for people of all ages. It's a wonderful escape when done solo or makes for great quality time spent together as a family. Use these ideas to guide you in your gardening activities and reap the benefits of long-lasting petunia and pansy blooms.



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Spring awakening: 5 expert tips to help renew your lawn

(BPT) – As a homeowner, now is the perfect time to start thinking about lawn care again. Spring is your first - and best - opportunity to get your outdoor living space in top shape for the warmer months ahead. And depending on where you live in the U.S., that window begins whenever the soil starts warming.

To help you get ready for a healthy, lush green lawn this spring, a leading national lawn care company, shares five things you should do.

1) Start with a spring cleanup: Spring cleaning isn't just for the inside of your home. Your lawn has collected fallen leaves, sticks and other debris over the winter months. Leaving behind this plant matter can smother the growth of your lawn and leave behind unsightly dead patches on the turf. A cleanup will give your lawn room to breathe, so it can take in water and sunshine, as well as any fertilizer or weed control treatments.

2) Clean up the mower: Spring is also time to dust off the lawn mower, fill it with fresh fuel and get your first mow. The first mowing of the season removes dead blades of grass and encourages the lawn to start waking from its winter slumber.

3) Get a step ahead of weed growth:

The return of crabgrass is not something to look forward to, however, the good news is, you can get these and other unsightly weeds under control by applying a treatment before they start popping up around your lawn. But keep in mind, it's important to get the timing just right.

"Timing is critical when it comes to applying preventative weed treatments," says Brian Feldman, Director of Technical Operations – North for a leading lawn care company. "Treatment should be applied under very specific soil and temperature conditions. Otherwise, it won't work and you'll end up wasting both product and effort."

To take the guesswork out of weed control, consulting with a lawn care professional can bring you peace of mind and deliver desired results.

4) Nourish your lawn: Spring presents yet another important window of opportunity to achieve a thick, healthy lawn. After being dormant all winter, it will need a dose of food to help it spring back to life and start growing.

Because by summer, your turf will be facing many stresses – heat, drought, insects and disease. A light application of fertilizer can help your lawn take full advantage of spring

growth and have it at its best. Don't forget your trees and shrubs, too! The amount of fertilizer needed varies with the age and where your trees and shrubs are located, so contact a professional for expert treatment.

5) Set a simple watering schedule: Regular rainfall is optimal for healthy grass. But when the sun is beating down and it's been more than a week since the last rainfall, you'll need to supplement the lack of rain with a sprinkler. Luckily, you can keep it simple as most lawns will thrive and grow with one inch of water per week. To keep track, set a few empty tuna cans around the lawn. When they get full – indicating an inch of water – you can move the sprinkler to a different section. Trees and shrubs also need some watering TLC; keep them hydrated also, particularly when temperatures start to spike.

It's important to remember that every state and region has unique grass and plant types that present their own needs and challenges. Yet, a thick, green lawn you will feel proud of is closer than you think. Call your local lawn professional and they'll create a plan that's tailor-made for your outdoor living space to get it into great shape this spring.

Did you know?

Without pollinators, more than 100 crops grown in the United States would not be able to thrive. Plants, including various fruits, vegetables, nuts and more, rely on pollinators to ensure to transport pollen. Though many plants are self-pollinating and others are pollinated by the wind or water, many others rely on insects and animals to become pollinated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says birds, bees, bats, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, and small mammals all can work as pollinators. Examples of crops pollinated by pollinators include apples, squash and almonds. Animals and insects help pollinate more than 75 percent of the world's flowering plants, and nearly 75 percent of all crops, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Unfortunately, pesticide use can diminish the number of natural pollinators. Natural gardening and pest-control can help protect the habitats of pollinators.

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Spruce, Callery pear have no home in Illinois landscapes

URBANA — They are beautiful, tempting, and frequently for sale in Illinois garden centers, but many non-native trees are less than ideal for land of Lincoln landscapes.

“Some fall onto my ‘do not plant’ list,” says Ryan Pankau, a University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator. “Many such ornamental plants make my list

due to their invasive habit, but some are on there for generally poor performance as urban trees.”

Colorado blue spruce is a non-native, commonly planted landscape tree that suffers from many issues here in Illinois.

One such tree, the Colorado blue spruce, *Picea pungens*, is native to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and

several surrounding western states. Adapted to the cool, dry climate of the Rockies, it does well in more sandy and well drained soils; however, it is commonly sold in Illinois gardening centers.

“Despite its unique and beautiful, blue-green foliage, Colorado blue spruce tops my list of trees not to plant in Illinois,” Pankau says. “When planted in

the Midwest, blue spruce suffers from our hot humid summers and often poorly drained soils.”

Unless the blue spruce is planted in near optimal conditions for Illinois, the stresses of the local climate and soils add up over time, reducing the plant’s health and vigor. As these trees mature, it is a sure bet they will suffer from a variety

of common diseases, issues and problems. For information about common issues with spruce trees, visit go.illinois.edu/SpruceProblems.

“Callery pear, *Pyrus calleryana*, is widely planted for its ornamental value, with more than 20 cultivars available at my last count,” says Pankau. “The plant certainly has appeal, with nearly a month or more of flower display each year. But it definitely has its problems.”

Native to East Asia, Callery pear has relatively few disease or insect issues in the U.S., but it is highly susceptible to storm damage.

“Callery pear’s compact and pyramidal habit can be attributed to a propensity for narrow branch angles with weak attachment,” says Pankau. “When it’s mature, the ultimate fate for many of these trees is to peel apart in a wind or ice storm, leaving an irregular and unattractive canopy.”

On a more serious note, this species has shown to be increasingly invasive.

While most cultivars are sterile, cross pollination between the many commonly planted varieties has created fertile fruits. As birds eat and disseminate these fruits, new pear trees pop up all over the place.

“From fence rows to highway right of ways, to edges of yards or local natural areas, you can see Callery pears on nearly any drive around central Illinois when it is in flower,” Pankau says.

It is one of the only woody species to have white, abundant flowers during its bloom time in early spring, making it easily identifiable.

“Callery pear is yet another plant that I would argue has great ornamental value, like the blue spruce,” Pankau says. “However, vulnerability to storm damage can limit its longevity in the landscape and when you combine that with the threat to natural areas it poses as an invasive species, it’s just a tree that we all need to stop planting.”



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Callery pear is a plant that has great ornamental value, like the blue spruce, however, vulnerability to storm damage can limit its longevity in the landscape.

Dress up the landscape with spring flowering shrubs

By Melinda Myers

Add a burst of color to the start of the garden season with spring flowering shrubs. Small or large, these beauties add color, support pollinators, and help attract birds to the landscape.

Make room in mixed borders and gardens for these spring bloomers. Use varieties with slightly different bloom times to create continuous color throughout the spring. Complement these with spring flowering perennials and bulbs. Once the shrubs finish flowering, they add some nice greenery to the border.

Plant a few compact varieties in containers for added color on patios and decks. Add seasonal color with annuals, pansies or other cool weather tolerant flowers for spring and fall. Replace these with petunias, lantana, or other suitable heat tolerant flowers for summer.

Forsythia and lilacs are traditional spring favorites. Forsythia's bright yellow flowers signal spring for many. The showy flowers have a slight fragrance, and the plants are basically pest free. Select varieties whose flower buds will survive cold winter temperatures, so there will be blossoms from the tip of the stem to ground level.

Lilacs fragrant flowers may generate wonderful childhood memories. Select the preferred white, pink, or purple color and varieties that will fit the growing location when mature. These will brighten any spot later in the spring.

Look for other easy-care, spring-blooming shrubs to include in the landscape. The spring blooms of viburnum are sure to provide plenty of enjoyment not to mention its attractive foliage, fall color, and fruit that attracts birds. Use them to create an attractive screen, hedge, or mixed border. Several viburnum varieties, like Korean Spice and doublefile, make great specimens or impressive small groupings in the landscape.

Brighten those shady spots with azaleas. These spring bloomers thrive with afternoon or dappled shade. Grow them in moist, rich, acidic soil in a sheltered location for best results. Make sure there is a good view to enjoy the blossoms and hummingbirds they attract.

Light up the spring garden with Garden Glow dogwood. The bright chartreuse foliage turns a burgundy red in fall. The white flowers give way to blue fruit and the red stems are a welcome sight in winter.

Other dogwoods, like red twig and gray dogwoods, are native shrubs with flowers that support pollinators and fruit that feeds the birds.

Fothergilla's fragrant white spring flowers are a favorite of hummingbirds. This beauty ends its season with a colorful mix of yellow, orange, and scarlet fall color often on the same leaf.

Add an evergreen backdrop of boxwood, arborvitae, and junipers to showcase these spring beauties. The spring blossoms, fall color, and winter interest will shine when positioned in front of greenery.

Take a walk through the landscape now to identify places that would benefit from some spring color. Select the right plants that are suited to the growing conditions and complement the garden design. Then plant and enjoy these colorful additions for years to come.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including *The Midwest Gardener's Handbook* and *Small Space Gardening*. She hosts *The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything"* DVD series and the nationally-syndicated *Melinda's Garden Moment* TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine. Her web site is www.melindamyers.com.



Forsythia's bright yellow flowers signal spring for many. The showy flowers have a slight fragrance, and the plants are basically pest free.

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