
RAISED BED HAPPINESS ALL YEAR ROUND

*365 Days of Fresh Vegetables, Herbs & Salads – With Planting
Calendar, Care Tips and a Sustainable Harvest Plan*

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Introduction

My Path to Raised Bed Happiness

I didn't grow up gardening. Like many people in Germany, I spent most of my childhood in apartments, where a balcony or a sunny windowsill was the closest thing to a green space. But after moving into a home with even a small garden patch, I felt a new curiosity. I wanted to grow my own food, not just because of rising prices at the supermarket or concerns about where produce comes from, but because I wanted to experience what it's like to grow a crisp head of lettuce or pluck fresh basil moments before dinner.

My first attempts in the open soil were humbling: snails devoured my seedlings, weeds spread faster than anything I'd planted, and by midsummer, the soil had dried out and cracked under the sun. I wasn't ready to give up, I just needed a better system. That's when I discovered the raised bed.

What began as a single wooden frame filled with compost and soil turned into a life-changing hobby. Within a year, I had a cycle of fresh greens, herbs, and vegetables — not just in summer, but into early spring and even the cold months. I could grow more in less space, control the soil quality, and cut down on watering and weeding.

This book is the result of that transformation. Whether you have a sprawling garden, a modest backyard, or just a terrace or balcony, **a raised bed gives you more control, more productivity, and more joy**. And best of all: it works **all year round** with the right approach.

Why a Raised Bed Is Worth It All Year Round

A raised bed isn't just a box of soil. It's a controlled, compact, and efficient mini-garden that makes home-growing accessible and rewarding. Especially in climates like Central Europe's, where spring comes late and autumn comes early, the raised bed extends the growing season on both ends.

With the right preparation, you can start sowing hardy crops in March and keep harvesting into December. Even winter-hardy varieties, like kale, lamb's lettuce, and spinach, can thrive under covers or fleece in raised beds. During cold months, your raised bed rests while you plan the next cycle. And as spring returns, it wakes up faster than open soil because it warms up quicker, a big advantage in temperate climates.

In urban areas across Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, more and more people are turning to raised beds. Community gardens, balcony planters, and even mobile raised beds on wheels are becoming popular, and for good reason. You don't need much space to eat fresh from your garden 365 days a year.

Whether you're growing for taste, health, sustainability, or fun — or all four — the raised bed delivers.

Advantages Over a Traditional Garden

Many gardeners in Europe are shifting from traditional in-ground gardening to raised beds for a number of reasons. Let's look at the clear advantages:

1. Better Soil Control: In many parts of Germany, the soil is either too sandy, too heavy with clay, or contaminated from past land use. Raised beds let you choose and layer your soil, typically a mix of compost, green waste, and topsoil, to suit your crops. You know exactly what your plants are growing in.

2. Fewer Weeds, Fewer Pests: Weeds have a harder time invading a raised bed, especially if you use a bottom barrier and mulch well. Snails and other ground-dwelling pests are also easier to control, and with a few clever tricks (like copper tape or snail fences), you can keep them out almost entirely.

3. Earlier Starts, Longer Seasons: Raised beds warm up faster in spring and hold warmth better in fall. That's a big plus in northern and central Europe, where frosts linger into April and return early in October. With fleece covers or small cold frames, you can stretch the season even further.

4. Ergonomic & Accessible: Tired knees, sore backs? A raised bed makes gardening more comfortable. The working height, ideally around 80 cm, is easier on the body. This is especially appreciated by older gardeners or anyone with limited mobility.

5. Higher Yields in Less Space

Because of better soil and microclimate, crops in raised beds often grow faster and healthier than in open ground. You can grow more in a smaller area, especially with vertical add-ons like climbing frames or stacking planters.

6. Easier to Organize & Rotate: It's simpler to manage crop rotation, companion planting, and successive sowing in a clearly defined space. Raised beds lend themselves naturally to structured planning, and that's what this book is all about.

7. Neater, Prettier, and More Adaptable: Whether you're working in a traditional garden or setting up a stylish balcony box in Berlin, raised beds look neat and tidy. They keep plants contained and can double as decorative elements, especially if built with quality wood or stone.

Feature	Raised Bed	Traditional Garden
Soil Quality	Controlled, layered	Variable, depends on location
Weeds & Pests	Reduced, easier to manage	More common, harder to control
Growing Season	Extended with earlier starts	Shorter due to slower soil warm-up
Comfort	Ergonomic height	Requires kneeling or bending
Yield per m ²	Higher with planning	Lower unless very fertile soil

Ideal for Small Spaces	Yes – even balcony-friendly	Less suitable
Urban/Contaminated Soil Use	Yes – soil isolated from ground	Risk of contamination
Maintenance	Moderate, focused	Higher, due to soil/weather issues

Sustainability and Self-Sufficiency Made Easy

If you're feeling the pinch of rising food prices, shrinking biodiversity, or supply chain disruptions, you're not alone. More than ever, people across Europe are turning to local, resilient, and low-impact ways to meet their basic needs, starting with what goes on their plates.

But let's be honest: many of us don't have the time, space, or energy to manage a full traditional garden. A raised bed simplifies the process. You can grow **a surprising amount of food** in just one or two beds. With year-round planning and a few well-timed sowings, a 1.2 x 2-meter raised bed can supply most of the salad greens, herbs, and seasonal vegetables a small household needs.

And it's not just about food. When you grow in a raised bed:

- You **reduce packaging waste**.
- You **cut transportation emissions**.
- You **reuse compost and green waste** instead of sending it to the bin.
- You **harvest organically** — no need for chemical sprays.
- You **create a pollinator-friendly environment** even in the city.

Every tomato you grow, every head of lettuce you harvest, every handful of chives you snip, that's one more step toward independence. And it's deeply satisfying.

Even if you start small, it adds up. Many gardeners in Germany begin with one raised bed and end up expanding the next year. Why? Because once you experience fresh, just-picked food from your own backyard or balcony, it's hard to go back.

A Glimpse of What's Ahead

This book is your companion through every month of the gardening year. Whether you're new to gardening or a seasoned planter, you'll find practical, clear guidance, tailored to **Central European climates**, with **up-to-date recommendations**, and **easy-to-follow tips**.

You'll discover:

- Which crops to sow each month
- How to care for your bed through every season
- What grows best in your climate and space
- How to plan for a rotating, productive harvest
- How to garden sustainably with minimal waste

There's also a **month-by-month planting calendar**, **tables for rotation and companion planting**, and even **simple recipes** for making the most of your harvest.

You'll learn how to grow:

- Tender greens in spring
- Tomatoes, beans, and peppers in summer
- Root vegetables and hardy herbs in autumn
- Kale, lamb's lettuce, and winter spinach in the cold season

And you'll discover how to make the most of **every square meter**, whether you're working with a balcony box in Hamburg or a garden plot in Bavaria.

Raised Bed Gardening is for Everyone

You don't need a degree in horticulture. You don't need a big garden. You don't even need "green thumbs." What you need is the willingness to try, and the right guidance.

This book is built for real people with real lives. People who work, who raise families, who care about what they eat and how it's grown. People who want to take back a bit of control, connect with nature, and maybe even get their kids excited about gardening.

There will be successes and surprises, and, yes, some setbacks too. But once your first crop of radishes sprouts or your basil flourishes in early summer, you'll understand: raised bed happiness is real, and it's absolutely worth it.

CHAPTER 1: Planning & Preparation

The Ideal Location for Your Raised Bed

Before you hammer a single nail or pour your first bucket of compost, the first key to year-round raised bed success is choosing the *right* location. You can build the most beautiful bed, but if it's stuck in a dark corner or exposed to harsh winds, your yields, and motivation—will struggle.

Sunlight is Everything

The most productive raised beds in Germany and other EU climates get **at least 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight** daily, especially between March and October. That makes a **south-facing or southwest-facing** spot ideal. If you're unsure, spend a day observing your space. Where does the sun hit longest? Use your smartphone's compass or a sunlight tracker app to help.

Avoid full shade, especially in urban gardens where buildings or tall trees can limit light hours. That said, *partial shade* (4–6 hours) still works for leafy greens like spinach, lettuce, and herbs like parsley or chives.

Sunlight Needs by Crop	Light Hours/Day
Tomatoes, Peppers, Squash	8+ hours (Full sun)
Carrots, Beets, Onions	6–8 hours
Lettuce, Spinach, Kale	4–6 hours (Part sun)
Parsley, Mint, Chives	3–5 hours (Tolerates shade)

Shelter from Harsh Winds

Wind dries out soil quickly, stresses plants, and can damage young shoots. Look for a spot that's *naturally sheltered* or consider installing a windbreak (hedges, trellises, or a simple mesh fence). Especially in northern Germany or exposed rural areas, protecting your raised bed from west/northwest winds can make a big difference.

Drainage and Water Access

Raised beds should never sit in a puddle. Avoid low-lying spots where water collects. A slightly sloped area is fine, just ensure the bed itself is level to prevent runoff. Also, don't underestimate **proximity to a water source**. Whether it's a rain barrel, outdoor tap, or watering can refill spot, easy access saves you effort and encourages consistency. Many gardeners install a simple **drip irrigation system** connected to a rainwater tank.

Practical Placement Tips

1. **Keep it close to your kitchen** – you'll use fresh herbs more often.
2. **Consider visibility** – if you see it daily, you'll tend it more.
3. **Avoid tree roots** – they compete for water and nutrients.
4. **Check local regulations** – in community gardens or allotments (*Schrebergärten*), certain sizes or placements might need approval.

Materials & Construction Types Compared

One of the most common questions is: *What should I build my raised bed from?* The short answer: it depends on your budget, taste, and long-term goals. Here's a practical breakdown of the four most popular materials used in German and EU raised bed setups.

Wood: Warm, Natural, but Not Forever

Wood is the classic choice. It looks great, insulates well, and is easy to work with, even for DIY beginners. In Germany, **larch (Lärche)** and **Douglas fir (Douglasie)** are preferred thanks to their natural resistance to rot.

- **Pros:** Natural look, breathable, good thermal insulation
- **Cons:** Limited lifespan (5–10 years), needs protection from moisture
- **Best for:** Gardeners who like the natural aesthetic and don't mind rebuilding in the long run

Tip: Line the inside with pond liner or geotextile fleece to extend lifespan.

Stone: Beautiful and Built to Last

Whether dry-stacked or mortared, **natural stone or brick raised beds** offer durability and rustic appeal. They retain heat well, which benefits Mediterranean herbs and early crops.

- **Pros:** Very durable, retains warmth, attractive
- **Cons:** Expensive, heavy, labor-intensive to build
- **Best for:** Permanent installations and structured gardens



Metal: Modern and Durable

Galvanised steel beds (like *Hochbeete aus Cortenstahl*) are trending across EU cities and modern gardens. They're sleek, long-lasting, and maintenance-free.

- **Pros:** Ultra-durable, stylish, weather-resistant
- **Cons:** Can heat up too much in summer, higher cost
- **Best for:** Urban or modern gardens; those wanting a permanent solution

Note: To prevent overheating, insulate the inside walls with coconut mats or fleece, especially important in southern Germany or Austria during heatwaves.

Plastic & WPC (Wood-Plastic Composite): Lightweight and Low-Maintenance

Plastic beds or recycled composite materials are increasingly popular for **balconies, renters, or low-effort gardeners**.

- **Pros:** Light, rot-proof, quick to assemble
- **Cons:** Not eco-friendly if new plastic, can fade over time
- **Best for:** Small spaces, temporary beds, balconies

Eco Tip: Look for **recycled plastic beds (Recyclingkunststoff)**, many German brands now offer fully sustainable models.

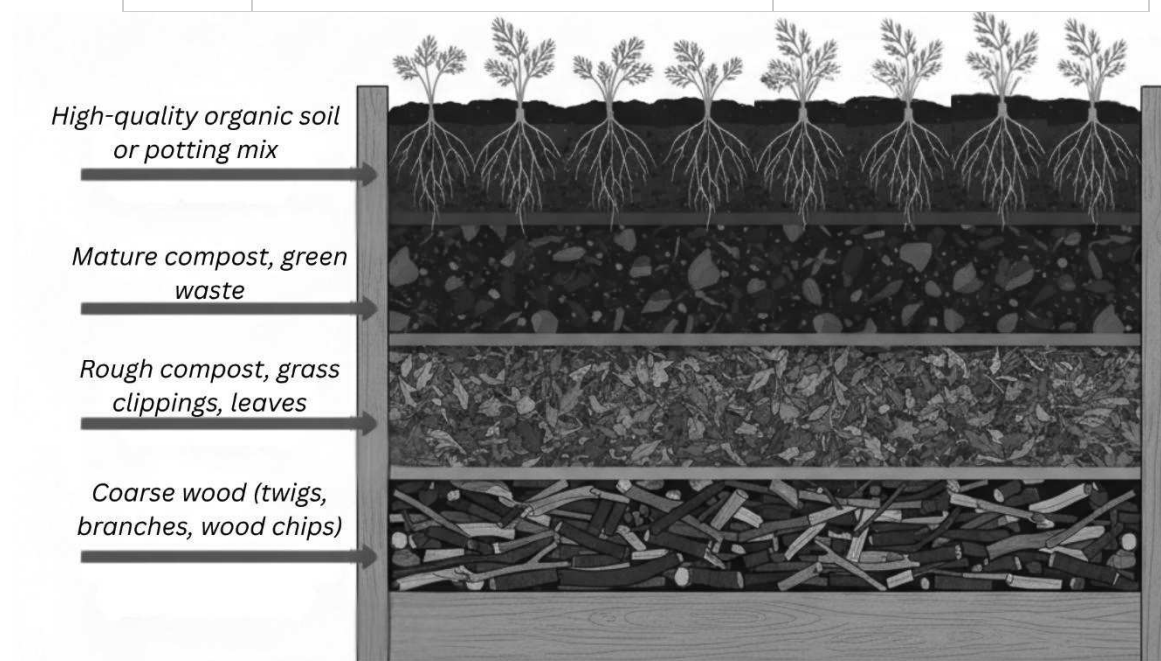
Material	Lifespan	Maintenance	Insulation	Price	Look
Wood (Larch)	5–10 yrs	Medium	Very good	€€	Natural
Stone	20+ yrs	Low	Excellent	€€€	Rustic
Metal	15–25 yrs	Low	Moderate	€€€	Modern
Plastic/WPC	10–15 yrs	Very low	Moderate	€€	Neutral

The Perfect Filling: Layers for Healthy Soil

Filling your raised bed properly is just as important as where and how it's built. A good raised bed isn't just a box of dirt, it's a layered system that feeds your plants and retains structure over years. This technique, originally popularized in Austria and Germany, is often called the *Hügelbeet-Prinzip* (mound bed principle).

A raised bed typically consists of **four distinct layers**, each about 5–10 cm thick depending on the total height of your bed (ideally 60–80 cm for most vegetables).

Layer	What to Use	Purpose
Bottom	Coarse wood (twigs, branches, wood chips)	Drainage & aeration
Middle 1	Rough compost, grass clippings, leaves	Heat and microbial life
Middle 2	Mature compost, green waste	Nutrient-rich buffer
Top	High-quality organic soil or potting mix	Root zone and water retention



Why layering works:

- **Drainage:** The woody bottom layer prevents soggy roots
- **Aeration:** Encourages deep, healthy root development
- **Nutrient cycling:** The inner composting layers heat up naturally and release nutrients gradually over 2–3 years
- **Soil health:** Microorganisms thrive in this diverse environment

Use What You Have

You don't need to buy special materials. In autumn, gather fallen leaves, hedge clippings, and grass cuttings. In spring, add compost from your kitchen or local green waste station.

Avoid diseased plant material or invasive weeds like *Giersch* or *Quecke*—they can resprout even from small roots.

Soil Check & Refresh Plan

Even the best layered bed will settle over time. Every **2–3 years**, top up with fresh compost and rotate crops to avoid nutrient depletion.

Want to be precise? Use a basic **pH test kit** (available in most German garden centers) to ensure a slightly acidic to neutral soil (pH 6–7), ideal for most vegetables.

Pre-filled Kits: Worth It?

Many hardware stores in Germany (e.g. OBI, Hornbach, Bauhaus) now offer **pre-filled raised bed soil kits**. While convenient, they're often overpriced and may not contain long-term nutrients. Consider mixing your own for better quality control and cost savings.

What not to add:

- Construction debris or treated wood (can release toxins)
- Pure peat (unsustainable and low nutrients)
- Too much kitchen waste (may attract pests)

Start smart, and your raised bed will reward you all year round. By choosing the best location, using suitable, durable materials, and building a layered soil system, you're setting the stage for months, if not years, of effortless harvests.

Raised Bed Sizes and Shapes for Every Garden

Choosing the right size and shape for your raised bed is more than a design choice, it's the key to a smooth, productive gardening experience. In Germany and across Europe, where gardens come in all shapes and sizes, getting this right helps you avoid common frustrations and enjoy consistent success.

Standard Raised Bed Dimensions

The most functional raised beds are designed to match your reach and comfort. In German gardens, you'll commonly find raised beds that are:

- **Length:** 120–200 cm
- **Width:** up to 120 cm (if you can access both sides)
- **Height (frame):** 60–80 cm

Width is critical. If your bed is against a wall or fence (one-sided access), keep it **no wider than 60–75 cm**. If you can access both sides, a width up to **120 cm** works well. Anything wider makes it hard to reach the center, and nobody wants to step into the soil and compress it.

TIP: A width of **100–120 cm** is ideal for most adult gardeners with two-sided access.

Height: Comfort and Function

A raised bed's **frame height** should ideally be **60–80 cm**, which gives you back-friendly access without too much bending. That said, what plants care about most is **soil depth**, not total frame height.

- **Minimum soil depth** for most vegetables: **30–45 cm**
- **Deeper beds (60+ cm)** are great for root crops like carrots or parsnips, and they retain moisture better
- **High beds (80–100 cm)** are perfect for seniors or wheelchair users, making gardening more accessible

Height / Depth	Best For
30–45 cm (soil)	Leafy greens, herbs, compact veggies
60–80 cm (frame)	Back-friendly use, deeper root growth
90–100 cm	Seniors, barrier-free access

Shapes That Work

Raised beds can be more than just rectangular boxes. Depending on your garden size and layout, you might consider:

- **Rectangular:** The most space-efficient and common layout
- **Square:** Great for smaller areas or container gardening
- **L-shaped or U-shaped:** Ideal for corners or maximizing working access
- **Round or oval:** Visually softer, but less practical for row planting or trellising



Modular and Expandable Beds

In recent years, **modular raised bed systems**, especially metal or WPC, have become popular in EU markets. These can be easily expanded or rearranged, perfect for gardeners who want to start small and grow their setup over time.

Leading brands in Germany like **Biohort**, **Juwel**, or **Hochbeet Profi** offer robust systems with UV protection, insulation, and built-in corner reinforcements. These often last for 15+ years with minimal maintenance.

Sizing Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Too wide:** Makes it hard to maintain and harvest
2. **Too shallow:** Soil dries out quickly and limits plant growth
3. **Too tall too soon:** Remember, taller beds need more filling — which means more compost and cost
4. **Odd shapes without purpose:** Keep it functional first

Choosing your bed size and shape is one of the few gardening decisions that doesn't depend on the weather. Get it right once, and your body, and your plants, will thank you for seasons to come.

Raised Beds for the Garden, Terrace, or Balcony

Raised beds aren't just for large gardens, they thrive just as well on city balconies, paved terraces, and even roof decks. Thanks to modern materials and smart design, there's a solution for nearly every living situation in the EU.

Garden Raised Beds (Full-Sized Outdoor)

With a classic outdoor garden, you have maximum flexibility, which means you can go bigger, deeper, and more productive. A few things to keep in mind:

- **Size:** 120–200 cm long, up to 120 cm wide
- **Frame height:** 60–80 cm is ideal for comfort
- **Soil depth:** 30–45 cm minimum for vegetables
- **Paths:** Leave 60–80 cm space between beds for walking or tool access

You can also install **trellises** for vertical growers like beans, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Many gardeners choose **permanent materials** like larch wood, stone, or galvanized steel for long-term durability.

Pro tip: In gardens with multiple beds, align them in rows along the sun path (east to west) for optimal light exposure.

Terrace Raised Beds (On Pavement or Decking)

Terraces and paved courtyards make excellent growing zones, as long as you adapt for hard surfaces.

Best features for terrace beds:

- **Bottom-sealed beds** with drainage holes or water overflow valves
- **Lightweight but durable materials** like metal or WPC