

Raised Bed *or* In-Ground?

Your first big garden decision. The right answer depends on three things: **soil, budget, time-to-harvest.**

RAISED BED For Beginners

Faster wins.
Better soil, better drainage, easier on your back.

IN-GROUND For Budget

Cheaper. Scales naturally.
Under \$50 to start. No materials per square foot.

01 / Why setup matters **Setup beats seeds.**

<p>Ⓛ</p> <p>Compaction Starves roots of air and water.</p>	<p>◇</p> <p>Drainage Wet soil rots roots fast.</p>	<p>☀</p> <p>Weeds Native soil = dormant seeds.</p>	<p>⚠</p> <p>Back Pain Bending kills enthusiasm.</p>
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02 / The two approaches **What you're actually choosing between**

Option A · Raised Bed

soil mix · 12" frame · above grade

Built above the ground.
Framed in wood or metal. Filled with your own soil mix.

SIZE 4 × 8 ft	SWEET SPOT 12 in
RANGE 6–24 in	FRAME Wood / Steel

Option B · In-Ground

native soil · amend in place

Dig and plant.
Work the native soil in your yard. Amend as needed.

SIZE Any shape	START WITH Soil test
RANGE Unlimited	TOOLS Shovel + compost

03 / Head-to-head **Seven rounds, scored.**

	RAISED BED	IN-GROUND	WINNER
Soil Quality & CONTROL	You pick the mix. Day-one ideal. ██████████ 92	Stuck with native soil. 1–2 seasons to fix. ██████████ 48	Raised
Drainage	Drains by design. Spring-rain proof. ██████████ 88	Pools in clay. Stays wet too long. ██████████ 46	Raised
Weed Pressure	Clean slate. Weeds pull easy. ██████████ 85	Seeds push up from below. ██████████ 42	Raised
Cost to Start	\$150–\$400 per bed. ██████████ 35	Often under \$50. ██████████ 95	In-Ground
Physical Ease	Work at 12–18". Less bending. ██████████ 90	Ground-level. Adds up fast. ██████████ 45	Raised
Scalability	Each new bed = more \$\$ ██████████ 55	No per-sq-ft cost. Wins big at 200+ sq ft. ██████████ 90	In-Ground
Season Length	Warms early. 2–3 week head start. ██████████ 82	Slow to warm. Lose early windows. ██████████ 55	Raised

04 / The cost gap **Where the money actually goes**

<p>◇ RAISED BED · 4 × 8 FT</p> <p>\$150–\$400</p> <p>Per bed. It compounds.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Cedar frame</td> <td>\$80–\$200</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Soil mix · 8 cu ft</td> <td>\$50–\$150</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hardware</td> <td>\$20–\$50</td> </tr> </table>	Cedar frame	\$80–\$200	Soil mix · 8 cu ft	\$50–\$150	Hardware	\$20–\$50	<p>● IN-GROUND · SAME FOOTPRINT</p> <p><\$50 typical</p> <p>Mostly your time.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Hand tools</td> <td>owned</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Compost</td> <td>\$15–\$30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Soil test</td> <td>\$0–\$20</td> </tr> </table>	Hand tools	owned	Compost	\$15–\$30	Soil test	\$0–\$20
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05 / Match your situation **Pick your path.**

Raised	In-Ground	Raised	Raised	In-Ground
Urban yard, clay soil Skip the multi-year fix.	Big rural lot, good soil Use what you've got.	Renting or might move Frames travel. Yards don't.	Back or knee issues Height changes everything.	Tight budget, big garden Start cheap. Add beds later.

06 / Bed-depth guide **How deep, for what.**

<p>6–8"</p> <p>SHALLOW ROOT</p> <p>Lettuce, herbs, radishes.</p>	<p>12"</p> <p>★ SWEET SPOT</p> <p>Tomatoes, peppers, beans. When in doubt — pick this.</p>	<p>18"+</p> <p>DEEP ROOT</p> <p>Carrots, parsnips, potatoes.</p>
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Start with one space. Get something growing.

The best garden is the one you actually build.

The Beginner's Field Guide

Raised vs. In-Ground

Vol. 01 · Spring

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