

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. So in today's episode I'm diving into a topic. I get a ton of questions about how we built our very unique raised bed garden. Now, in a previous episode I told you all about why we built the beds and also relayed the very sad story of how I accidentally poisoned my garden. But in today's episode we're getting more into the nitty gritty of how we actually built them. So if you have been contemplating building beds of your own, or you just like mine and are curious how we did it, this is the episode for you. I'm your host Jill winger. And for the last 10 years I had been helping people just like you who feel uninspired by modern life. I'll show you how to leave the rat race and create the life you really want by growing your own food and mastering old fashioned skills.
- Speaker 1: [01:06](#) Alrighty. So there are lots of ways to build raised beds. I just want to start this episode off by saying if you are contemplating a raised bed garden, you don't have to build it like we built ours. There's tons of ways to do this. You can use regular boards, you can make them low to the ground, you can make them high, elevate it up off the ground. You can use cement blocks, you can use thinner galvanized sheets with a wood frame. Some people even grow things in trash cans or buckets, so there's lots of ways to get this done. We personally went with a slightly more unorthodox design, and I'm going to explain why we did that in this episode, but I just want to reassure you that if you're getting the itch to garden, it doesn't have to be a production. It doesn't have to be something you put off for five years and say, someday I will garden in raised beds.
- Speaker 1: [02:03](#) Like you can start this feasibly right now unless it's like the dead of winter, but you don't have to make it as complicated as we did. We had our reasons, which you'll hear more about in a minute, but I just want to reassure you it's possible. Okay. So our raised beds get some attention because number one, they're built out of metal basically and they just look pretty different as compared to a lot of other raise beds floating around. We went with bridge decking steel as the basis of our raised beds. Now at first glance you may have seen pictures of my beds on social media or my blog. It looks like your typical galvanized sheet metal. It's shiny silver. It has the, you know, corrugated look to it. It looks pretty normal. The differences that bridge decking steel is much more sturdy and solid and thick. And the reason we opted for this is because it's not going to bow out with the pressure of all the dirt in the beds.
- Speaker 1: [03:15](#) So our beds are tall, you know, they're elevated off the ground a little bit and we didn't want to have to build a wooden frame.

So a lot of the times when you see pictures of like the galvanized beds on Pinterest, they're pretty cool looking. They have like a two by four frame around the top and the bottom in the corners. And then the galvanized sheet metal is just the panel that fits inside of that frame and the frame acts as a brace and holds the metal in place. Because when you put dirt in there, it's gonna really start pushing it out. And without the wooden frame, it's gonna pop out the nails or the screws or the bolts or whatever you're using. Now, because we were going to build so many beds in our garden, like we wanted at least 20, which is what we ended up with.

Speaker 1: [04:03](#) Christian, my husband wasn't super keen on the idea of having to build, you know, detailed frame wooden frames for each bed. He just wasn't loving that idea. We were, you know, getting late in the season. The year that we built these beds, we wanted them done so we could start planting. So we schemed for quite a long time about how to assemble them as quickly as possible. And the thing we loved ultimately about bridge decking steel is that we could bolt the panels or sheets of steel to the posts and the corners and it's sturdy in rigid enough that no matter how much dirt we put in there, it's not going to push out the sides. So that was our biggest thought process in regards to the building material. Now the downfall to bridge decking steel is that it's kind of hard to source. We got lucky in that we had a neighbor who welds wind breaks for cattle out of this steel.

Speaker 1: [05:06](#) These are very heavy windbreaks and they just protect livestock from the crazy winter blizzards and winds. So he had a supplier and we ended up purchasing this steel from him and that was pretty easy for us. Now obviously you guys are likely not in that same situation. So if you're going going to hunt down bridge decking steel, you're probably gonna want to look at some sort of specialty construction supplier or like the sort of construction store that would supply contractors. You're not going to find it at your typical home depot or Lowe's. It's just not going to be there. Once we found our steel, we had to cut it, which was also a little bit, uh, more challenging than it would've been if we had used galvanized because the steel was so thick. So the sheets came in size of 36 inches wide by 24 feet long.

Speaker 1: [06:10](#) And what we ended up doing is cutting that panel in half and we had to use a plasma cutter to cut it because it was so thick and so rigid. We were able to get one and a half beds built per steel panel since we cut it down. Now it's a little bit pricey. When we priced it out, each panel was about \$150. So we're looking at, you know, a little over a hundred dollars for each bed. Again, that seems extravagant at the beginning, but when we looked

at other materials such as like if we were going to do wood, we wanted to do some sort of long lasting woods such as redwood or Cedar, something that wasn't going to rot and we'd have to replace every couple years. And we price that out to build the entire bed out of wood. It actually was more expensive.

Speaker 1: [07:02](#)

So it seems a little crazy at first glance. But for us in terms of durability, the bridge decking still was actually more affordable. Okay. So once we cut our panels, we bolted them with lag bolts onto four by four posts. And these were redwood posts. So we did end up buying a little bit of wood for that, but we didn't want them rotting off. So as I talk through today's episode, you're going to see a reoccurring theme that Christian and I don't like to have to rebuild things over and over. And the reason we're so paranoid about that is because there have been plenty of times in our homestead journey where we cut corners and have had to build things over and over again, and we're kind of tired of it. So now we know better and we'd rather pay a little more money up front to build it right the first time, rather than having to rebuild fence that breaks, replace posts that rot, you know, all of that fun stuff.

Speaker 1: [08:12](#)

So that's why it might seem a little bit excessive and maybe it is a little excessive. We're kind of extreme people. You know how we built it at the beginning, but we wanted these beds to last forever with his little maintenance as possible. Okay. So we've got our panels cut. We have our four by four posts. After we got all that ready, we bolted them. Like I said with lag bolts to the post and we assembled the whole thing in our shop. The bed we did, we did not put bottoms on them. Just want to clarify, get a lot of questions. You know, do we have a bottom? We do not. So we just had a box with legs and an open bottom. We ended up having the posts. The four by four is be 24 inches tall. And so that was six inches that we were able to bury into the ground.

Speaker 1: [09:07](#)

And then 18 inches of that post was covered in panel. Our beds are basically 18 inches tall with six inches in the ground. Once we assembled them in our shop, we hauled them out to our garden area. Just to back up a little bit, before we assembled these beds, we had been working on our garden area and I think it's going to be pretty important if you're putting in a raised bed garden of your own, you're going to want to have that area level. So we had opted to use a portion of our yard that was our old garden that I had poisoned and we extended it out a little bit. We made it a little bit longer and a lot of that ground was pretty unlevel and we wanted it to be level so the beds would sit nicely and not drained.

Speaker 1: [09:56](#) Weird. We just, you know, was just level is usually always preferred. So we used a skid loader and flatten it out and got it nice and tidy. And then we started to assemble the beds and lay them out in this area. One little trick here, and I don't know what sort of dirt you have available, but if you're putting in a lot of beds, it's not a bad idea if you're using a tractor or like we have a skid loader to fill the beds, do it as you go because if you're going to try to put them all in this tight pattern and then fill them from the ground up with dirt later and you're using a wheelbarrow, it's going to take a very long time. Our beds ended up being eight foot by four foot and there's 20 of them. And so if you can imagine trying to fill all of those one wheel barrel load at a time, I'd probably still be doing it.

Speaker 1: [10:54](#) So we use the equipment to fill them up, at least the bulk of it filled up with soil. And then over the years I've continued to add amendments or top it off with my wheelbarrow. But that's doable versus, you know, starting from scratch. As we laid out the beds, we filled them with soil. We also laid out our sprinkler system before the beds were all filled in. We had decided to do a automated sprinklers set up because I am not awesome at watering. And funny thing is when you water vegetables they actually grow better. So Christian was bounded, determined to put any sprinkler system so the garden was not dependent on me to water it, which was very wise. And so he laid out a system of PVC pipe underneath the beds and he set the bed on top and then we had a piece of pipe that sticks up through the middle of each bed and we would, you know, let that stick up as we filled it with dirt, we had to be a little careful not to whack it with a tractor or whatever when we were filling it with dirt.

Speaker 1: [12:08](#) And then once it was filled we went in and attached little sprinkler heads and spaghetti line into each bed to be the sprinkler system. The actual setup of the beds took a day or two just as we filled and we tweaked sprinkler stuff. But it went in pretty quickly. We also left walkways obviously between the rows of beds. So there's 10 beds on each side. It's kind of a long skinny rectangular garden. There's 10 beds on each side and the walkway down the middle is two feet wide, maybe three feet wide. But it's big enough to get a wheelbarrow down. It's kind of tight, but I can for sure get a wheelbarrow down the middle, which is really important for us. If you're doing a similar setup, I highly recommend leaving yourself some wheelbarrow space. Then in between each bed shooting off of the main alley, there's also a two to three foot walkway there so we can get in between the beds in weed and plant and so on.

Speaker 1: [13:17](#) Initially we left our walkways just as dirt cause we were so focused on getting the beds finished and getting implanted and the sprinklers going, I just left it as dirt. I quickly realized that was not an awesome idea because the weeds were just insane. Even though we were walking on those paths every single day, it just was getting to be a weed jungle. So last year, uh, in the spring, early summer we weed whacked down everything and the rows really short and laid down landscape fabric and a hefty layer of bark or wood chips. And there was a lot of work to get that done. It was a little bit tedious, but it has helped to be perfectly honest. I still have weeds coming up along the edges because even though I tried so hard to get the landscape fabric to perfectly fit up underneath the beds, it didn't work perfectly.

Speaker 1: [14:15](#) So there's some holes and some weeds, but it's more manageable than it was prior to the fabric installation. Okay. I want to talk a little bit about the soil that we put in the beds cause that's a common question. And if you're filling beds of your own, you know, I would recommend looking around to see what you have in your yard. If you have just a handful of beds you may be able to scrounge around. For us, we had a pile of soil that was left over from leveling our garden area. So we were able to fill the beds, mostly with that soil. We didn't have to go buy extra soil, which was a huge bonus. We had some soil that was more top soil and some that was more clay and heavy. So we went through and fill the base layer of the beds with the yuckier clay soil and then came back through and did the top half with the nicer top soil.

Speaker 1: [15:15](#) Now my beds are pretty tall. They're 18 inches tall. You don't have to have beds that tall. It's totally a preference thing. There's really no huge advantage to having a bed that tall. The only thing I can think of would be if you have mobility issues or you have trouble bending over or that's painful for you, a taller bed is easier. Our main reason for building our beds tall was it was going to be really tedious for us to cut our panels down further. Our bridge decking steel panels. So 18 inches was kind of a happy medium. We could cut them in half and it would be one cut and that would be good. So trying to cut it again would've been a pain in the butt. That's why we went a little bit taller. But again, that's not a necessity. And if you have a limited supply of dirt, I wouldn't recommend making them super tall cause it's just more dirt you have to use to fill.

Speaker 1: [16:15](#) In addition to the soil that we added just from our yard, I also added at least a wheelbarrow or two of well composted manure to each bed and I kind of worked that into the soil. And I did that for two years in a row. I added manure, just kind of

continued to top it off until last year I had our soil tested and it said it was pretty high in nitrogen, which was directly related to the manure, the compost edition. So I've stopped doing that this year. Now next year I'll probably have our soil tested again. Maybe we'll keep adding manure or compost. But I didn't want to burn my plants by adding too much nitrogen. So we've kind of just paused. So other amendments I ended up adding would be like this year we're adding some mulch on top of the beds after they were planted, which has been a really great option because while raised beds I feel like have reduced weeds just because maybe not reduced, it's just easier to manage the weeds because it's in a contained area.

Speaker 1: [17:24](#)

We definitely have less weed issues and they feel less overwhelming than they used to. There are still weeds, so I've used some clean grass clippings and by clean I mean they have not been sprayed with any sort of lawn chemicals and we've been mulching with those and that's been wonderful to keep the weeds down. Now the other goal or the other objective of those grass clippings is that they will break down throughout the year and add more organic matter to the soil this spring, and we're three years into this raised bed thing, but this spring was the first time I felt like I needed to add additional soil to the beds. And this was mainly because a few of the beds, let's say about half of them had compacted and settled. And so the soil level had sunk down a little bit. So we ended up driving to the nearest town, which is about 45 minutes away and getting some topsoil now we had to pay for it and it was a little bit of a pain to haul it home and then individually disperse into the beds with my trusty wheelbarrow.

Speaker 1: [18:35](#)

So I'm going to try to avoid doing that very often. Only if it's absolutely necessary. My plan is that by continuing to add this organic matter into the soil, grass clippings, compost, et Cetera, that we can build up the soil level without having to purchase top soil from an exterior source. So that's really the gist of it. The beds have been amazing, like not without some challenges here or there as we figure out the happy medium of sprinklers and compost and so on. But they have really encouraged me to get out and enjoy gardening more just because I feel like I can stay on top of things a little more easily. If I leave on vacation and come home, I have more weeding to do. But as long as I'm staying up on weeding and since my watering is automated, I really only have, I'd say 15 to 20 minutes a day out in the garden worth of chores, which feels very doable and very manageable.

Speaker 1: [19:46](#)

And I actually look forward to it. I could spend more time out there if I wanted, but if I just spend 20 minutes a day, you know,

pick a couple beds at a time to just pluck the little weeds, make sure everything looks good. It's very, very manageable. And I've thoroughly enjoyed the raised beds. And in case you're wondering about production, they have produced food beyond my wildest dreams, and I honestly think a lot of that goes to the adequate amount of water they're getting. Imagine that. But they have been an amazing for growing all the vegetables. There really hasn't been anything that hasn't thrived in the beds. Potatoes, squash, cucumbers. I found that one four by eight bed. I just filled it with lots of cucumber seeds that will give us so many cucumbers, like more than I could handle. And it didn't look like that much.

Speaker 1:

[20:40](#)

Right. A 4x8 bed when I first planted it, I'm like, Oh man, this is just not enough. And it ended up being so much. So it's been fantastic. I highly recommend raise beds if you're just looking for an option that helps you keep your gardening more organized. It's been a huge game changer for me. Wrapping everything up and putting a little bow on it, just keep in mind there's really no right or wrong way to make your beds and yours do not have to be like mine. I cannot underscore that enough. We simply use the materials we had available and the ones that made sense to us. And you can do the same with what you have available in your area and within your budget. Okay. For all the details of our raised beds, including how we built them and all the numbers and specific specifics, you can grab my complimentary raised bed guide at theprairiehomestead.com/raisedbedguide and I'll drop that link in the show notes so you can grab it there as well. And that's it. My friends. If you have just a minute, I would be so honored if you popped over into iTunes, hit subscribe and left a quick review for this podcast so more people can find it and bring homesteading into their lives. Thanks so much for listening and I'll catch up with you next time on the old fashioned on purpose podcast.