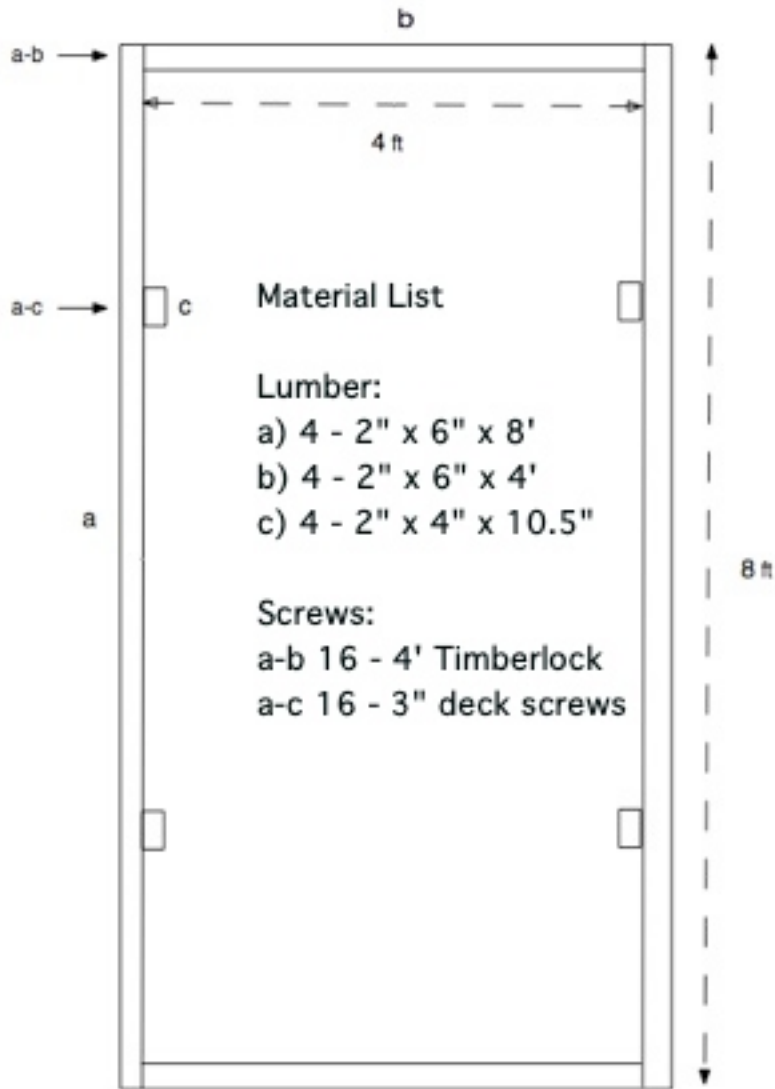


The Harvest Center: Building a 4' x 8' Raised Bed with Hooped Cover

Step 1: Build the raised bed frame

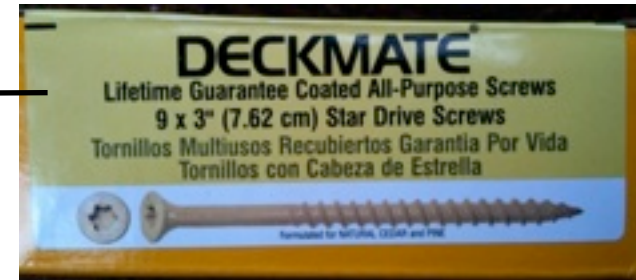
In our high altitude mountain environment, we believe a raised bed needs to be at least a foot deep. A practical solution is to use 2" x 6" lumber for the frame. PVC pipe and plastic are used to form a hooped covering for protection. Shade cloth, plastic, and deer netting may be a part of the protection plan. Construction of the frame is presented on this page.



Top View



Side View



Comments about lumber: Standard lumber available here is Hem-Fir. More costly are Redwood and Cedar. Scale back to a 3' x 6' bed and you may use inexpensive Cedar fencing (smaller screws will be required). It is best to pre-drill all lumber to prevent screws splitting the wood.



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Step 2: Fill the raised bed frame with soil

Our decomposed granite soil does not provide a friendly environment for growing vegetables... good minerals, but little nitrogen and organic matter.

Generally, we fill raised beds with the premium garden mix from Ute Pass Sand and Gravel. Composted llama, alpaca, cow, and horse manure are available for those who do their research. There is a local peat product which should be avoided to preserve the resource. In 2010 we began using biochar and effective microorganisms for soil improvement. The results have been encouraging.



Step 3: Install hoops on raised bed frame

Plastic water pipe or electrical conduit (1/2" diameter) are suitable for the hoops. Furring strips (1" x 2" lumber) and pipe clamps are used to tie together the hoop framework. For the sliding side curtain model, five pipes and three furring strips are used to form a rigid structure. The photo below on the right shows the lower side curtain furring strip attached with a 3/4" pipe clamp which allows sliding movement. The sliding curtain design requires five pipes, five furring strips and a mix of 1/2" (one hole and two hole) and 3/4" two hole pipe clamps. One hole pipe clamps are illustrate on the left. Two hole pipe clamps are seen on the right.



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Left: After installing the hoops, begin installing the furring strips at the ridge. Note the use of a one hole clamp at the ends. A two hole clamp is used in the middle.

Below: Note the 1" x 2" furring strip running the length of the raised bed is resting on the frame and attached to hoops 2, 3, & 4 using 3/4" clamps which allow the furring strip to slide up and down the hoops. Note the plastic film (6 mil) is attached to hoops 1 & 5 using cable ties. Segments of garden hose 4-6 inches long can be used to hold the plastic in place after being slit lengthwise, spread open, and placed over the plastic and hoop. Cable ties around hose pieces is the best option.



Above: You may have to cut a couple of inches off the furring strip used at the ridge. Connecting the ridge member to the end pieces is not essential, but will add stability to the structure. The more important issue is that the sliding furring strips have enough space from the end hoops that they slide easily after the cover material is applied. Note in the photo to the right: the space is larger in the area where sliding occurs.

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Step 4: Cover the raised bed frame with plastic, shade cloth or deer netting

Deer netting will protect your veggies from deer and generally discourage other critters. Shade cloth adds protection from hail, wind and excessive sunshine. Both of these options allow rain to pass through.

Plastic provides warmth and protection from hail, wind, deer, etc. On the downside: rain cannot pass through and the bed will “bake” in the summer sun. Our general recommendation is to use shade cloth as the permanent cover material and created a temporary use plastic “scroll” for times when the extra protection is needed.

Shade cloth (black or green) with a rating of 40%-60% works well for us.

Working with the 8' long bed and 10' plastic pipes indicates that the size of your cover cloth should be 8' x 10'. The first tool you will use is a stapler to attach the cover to the furring strips. Note the photo below left depicts shade cloth stapled to the furring strips and the use of short lengths of 1' x 2' screwed to the support frame for added strength.

Step 5: Think Creatively! No one design for a raised bed is best. Every bed below on the right is different! All beds grow food!

