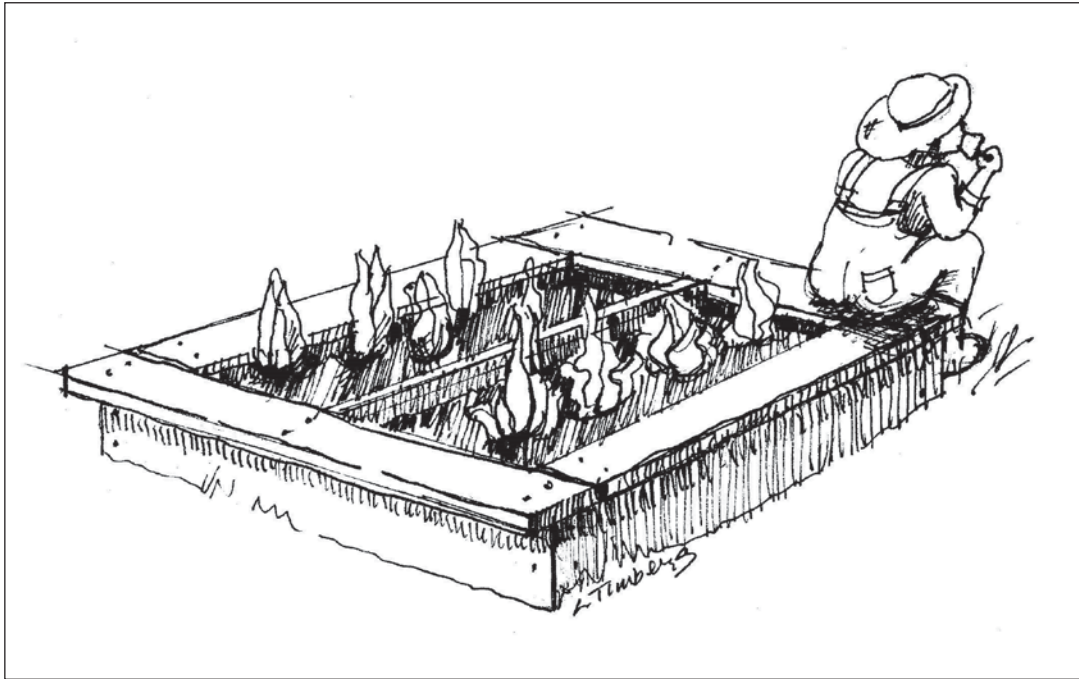


**GREEN INVESTMENT —
old style**

Looking for a Raise...A Little Extra Celery?

The last year of constant inflation had many workers pushing for a raise. As you invest time and money in your home garden perhaps its time for your own raise! By this I mean setting up raised beds in the garden—and by this I don't mean hammocks.

Raised beds are simple wooden boxes or cribs into which you add soil. Now, why would you want to do that. here are many reasons. Raised beds are ideal if your home soil is thin and filled with weeds. A foot-high box of new soil with cardboard under-



neath as a weed barrier is a great place to plant your favourite seeds. As you don't walk on the soil it doesn't get compacted so roots can thrive. With deeper soil your garden plot thickens. Because the soil is raised, it will warm up and drain quickly in the spring but for the same reason it will need more frequent watering in hot weather. A series of raised beds allows you to organize your planting plan with different boxes for different plants. The sides of the boxes double as a bench, which is easier than bending or kneeling. Planting and weeding one bed at a time breaks the task into manageable fragments and makes me feel that eventually, if I can overcome the weeds. Finally, the frame of the box provides a surface within which to insert weed-blocking fabric or even cover over with plastic or glass—voila, a mini greenhouse a.k.a. 'cold frame'. So many 'upsides' to this

raise! There are some 'downsides'—you'll need lumber and soil, a few tools and some basic carpentry skills—and one day it will all rot to add a little carbon to your ground.

I like the boxes to be about a foot high to allow the soil inside to be ten inches deep and so not spilling over the edge. Our best boxes are rectangles seven feet long and five feet wide with a partition wall down the middle, dividing the box in half (each side 2.5 feet wide and so easy to reach across). The frame is capped all around on top with flat boards that reinforce the box corners and provide a comfortable, level seat, as well as a perimeter lip to retain the soil. Before adding the new soil I cover the bottom with cardboard to block most weeds from the original ground surface. It will decompose by the time new roots are extending downward.

Because the box is filled with wet soil it will eventually decay. Using pressure treated lumber would prolong the life of the box but it would also draw copper, arsenic and other preservatives into the soil—an especially bad idea if you plan to grow and eat vegetables. Using a rot resistant wood like cedar is an option although an expensive one. I usually build the structural frame of the box with regular lumber and then line that with older, scrap lumber to face against the soil. The combined walls of old and new wood frame end up being over two inches thick. The added thickness also provides a wide surface on which to attach the cap boards. I tend to build a new box or two every year from the materials left over from other projects. This spring I used up all the available space with box number twenty-five. The materials at hand dictate the final shape so no two are alike but in an effort to make it look coordinated I painted the tops of each cap with some left-over red paint. By next fall, when I add leaves to the raised beds I'll certainly be 'raking it in'.

- By Robin Reilly

At their Black River Forest Garden, the Reilly's raise many types of plants and animals within a larger project to restore a diverse meadow and forest landscape.

