



## Why we grow in Raised Beds

*We're going to talk a little bit about why many community gardens use raised beds to grow and why East New York has a lot of vacant land.*

*This is a pretty serious topic, so you want to get people gathered in a circle, standing or sitting, and quiet & fully listening, before you start*

### INTRO:

You may have noticed that gardeners do not grow our plants directly in the ground, but usually inside of wooden boxes filled with soil. At the UCC Youth Farm and Hands & Heart Garden, even where we don't use wooden boxes, we have soil and compost piled on top of the ground that was originally there, sometimes on top of wood chips too.

### WHY DO YOU THINK THAT WE DO THIS?

*(most youth often guess that its bc its neater, or more organized, so you want to tell them that there is another reason)*

It's because most of the gardens in East New York are on land where there used to be houses. And before 1978, houses often used paint that had lead in it. Lead can be toxic for people if they eat it or breathe in the dust. When these houses were abandoned, they were knocked down, or burnt down by their owners. We grow in soil and compost that's on top of the ground that was originally there so that we don't risk lead, leftover from the paint from the houses that were here, getting into our plants. If you did deep enough on this lot, you'll start to find bricks, tiles, and parts of the foundations of the houses that used to be here. A couple of years ago a woman contacted us who used to live in one of the houses that used to be where UCC Youth Farm is now!

### WHY DID EAST NEW YORK HAVE SO MANY VACANT HOUSES?


One reason is that around the 1950s and 1960s, mostly white families lived in East New York. Around that time Black and Latino families started moving in. There were two main reasons for this. Until the 1950s and 1960s, most Black Americans lived in the South.

### What do you know about what was going on in the South in the 1950s and 1960s?

It was the Civil Rights era. People of color who had suffered discrimination and segregation for many years were starting to demand changes. But the white people in the South who wanted to continue segregation were not willing to let that happen easily, and there was a lot of violence against people of color in the South and a lot of conflict. At the same time, jobs in manufacturing and factories were available in the North, so many Black Americans decided it was time to leave the South for good. They moved to cities in the North, like NYC. Who has heard of the Great Migration? This massive movement of Black Americans from the South to the North was called the Great Migration.

### There was also something happening with immigrant reform in the 1960s.

Before the 1960s, the US had a "quota" system for immigrant which set a spe-



cific number of people from each country who were allowed to immigrate to the United States each year. They allowed higher numbers from White European countries, and lower numbers from countries with Black, Latino, and Asian people. After the Civil Rights era, more people started to see this law as racist and unjust. In 1965, a new law ended the quota system. This made it possible for a lot of people to immigrate to the US from the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Where do people usually go to when they immigrate? *[Answer: cities, bc that's where they assume it will be easiest to find jobs].*

With these two factors—the Great Migration and Immigration Reform—a lot of people of color were moving to New York City, and to East New York, into neighborhoods that used to be mostly white.

**What do you know about attitudes about race in the 1950s and 1960s?**

*[Most of the youth will know that many people were very prejudiced/racist at that time].*

A lot of white families were concerned that the value of their houses would go down because of the Black and Latino families moving in. They were worried about this either because they held negative beliefs about people of color and thought they would bring down the quality of the neighborhood, or because they thought that other people had these negative beliefs and that these other people would sell their homes and move elsewhere, or both. They worried that their homes would lose value. Homes in neighborhoods gain value when a lot of people want to live in that neighborhood - because so many people are willing to buy those homes, the prices go up. But when people are moving out of a neighborhood and not as many people are moving in, the value of the homes goes down, and people sometimes have to drop the price to get someone, anyone, to buy it.


**This is the concept of supply and demand—who has heard of this before?**

Supply is how much of a certain thing is available, and demand is how many people want it and how badly they want it. For example, gold is very expensive. Why do you think that is? It's something that is really hard to get—there's not a lot of supply. You can't just easily get a piece of gold yourself, it has to be mined and comes from only certain places in the world. And gold is very popular, a lot of people want to buy it. So with all of these people wanting it and so little of it available, the people who have gold can charge a lot of money for it, and people will pay it.

**Now what about one of the woodchips in the garden...do you think I would be able to sell this woodchip for \$100? Why not?**

It's because there's a lot of supply—they're all over the garden and you could very easily just pick one up yourself. And demand is not especially high—they're useful in the garden, but you're not dying to own this woodchip. So its value is pretty low.

**Now going back to housing, how do you think this applies?**



When white families were leaving East New York, Black and Latino families kept moving in, but not enough to fill all of the homes left empty by the people who moved out. With no one to live in all of these houses, a lot of them got very run-down, and were eventually knocked down. Landlords who used to rent out apartments couldn't find people to rent to, and sometimes burned down their buildings so that they could at least get the income from the insurance, since they weren't getting any income from renters.

### **WHITE FLIGHT**

When a few white families started moving out, that made the other white families even more nervous that their house would lose value, and more and more people started leaving. Because of their prejudices against people of color, they created exactly the situation they were worried about. Many people left so quickly it was called “white flight.”

**HAS ANYONE EVER HEARD THE TERM “SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY”?** *It's when you think something is going to happen, so without realizing it, you make it happen.*

This is what happened in East New York—white families thought the value of their homes would decline and the neighborhood would suffer, but what actually made that happen was that so many people moved out, not that people of color moved in.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD DECLINE**

Many of these vacant lots were used as dumps for things like car batteries and refrigerators that release toxins if not properly disposed of. For a while in the 70s East New York did not have trash pick-up service, so this became a big problem.

### **A POSITIVE FUTURE**

By the 1980's, East New York had many, many vacant lots. But this also meant that East New York had space for many, many community gardens. By the 1990s East New York had over 60 community gardens, more than any other neighborhood in New York City. Even though vacant lots came from a really terrible and painful part of the history of our community, hundreds of residents joined together to turn these lots into something really positive.

We'll talk more about this during a workshop we have this summer, but if you have a few questions we can talk about them quickly now.

### **WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?**

**BUILDING A RAISED BED** The amazing gardens we know today used to be vacant lots. We use raised beds in to make sure the soil is safe for growing. Sometimes there were old homes with lead or dumping of chemicals on these lots before they were cleaned and beautified. They also to help preserve soil from washing away.

## 1. Preparing the Site

- To prepare the site, get rid of rocks, weeds + old boards. Make sure rotted boards get cut up, tied in lift-able bundles and put out for the trash.
- Outline the bed dimensions on the ground with string + stakes (usually 4ft x 8 or 10ft). Make sure it's 2 ft from the next bed over.
- Dig, with vertical strokes, along the outline, just deep enough to level the area. Make sure the area is level by using a level on a piece of scrap board and a level. Add soil to the part that is too low or dig out a little bit where it is too high.



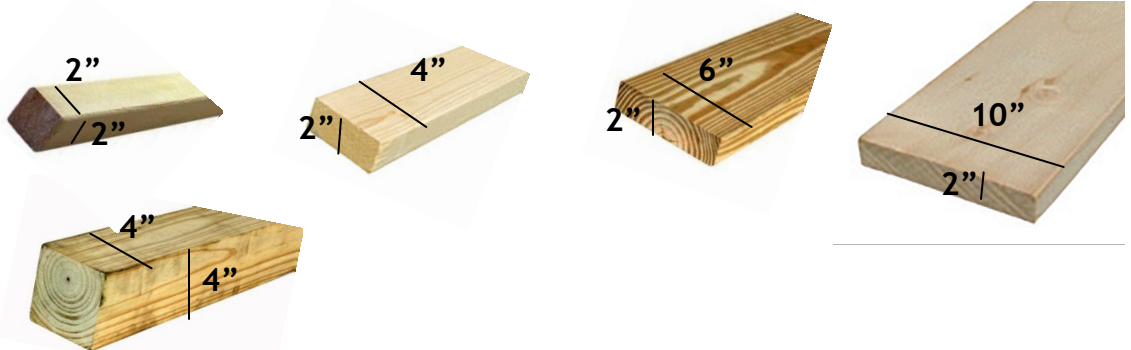
## TOOLS

### Step 1

- Level
- Shovel
- String + stakes
- Scrap 2x4
- Measuring tape

## Lumber:

Lumber is described by its measurements: 2"x4"x10' means: 2 inches wide-by-4inched High-by-10 feet long.

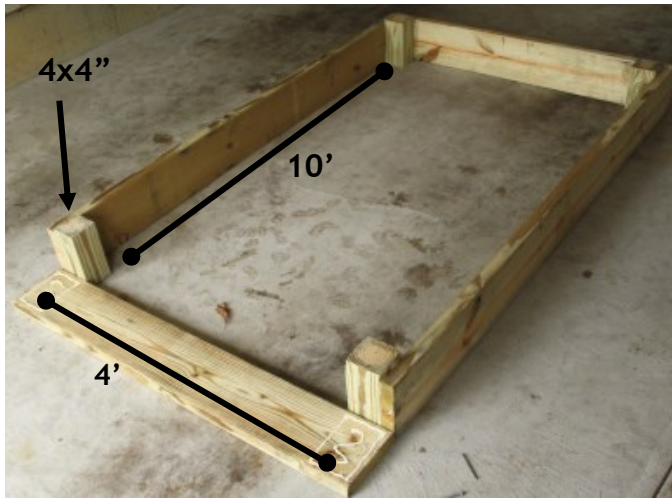




# YOUTH FARM HANDBOOK

## 2. Building the Bed

- For a bed that is 1 level high, cut a 4"x4" into four corner posts the same height as the lumber you are using.



The 4' board is capping the long boards. This makes sure your bed is 4ft wide + the long sides are supported.

- Cut two of the 2"x6"s (or 2"x10"s depending on the height of your bed) into two 4ft pieces.
- Set the long 2"x6" on its thin edge on a flat surface (like the sidewalk) + place a 4"x4" corner post at one end. The 4ft board will "cap" the bed.



- Use the clamps to hold your wood together tightly. Any spaces will fill with water + rot the wood.
- Pre-drill 2 holes at an angle through the board + the corner post at least one inch from the edge of the board. *This prevents the wood from splitting.* Secure post with two 2½ or 3" screws (if it's a 2"x10" you can use 3 screws in a triangle formation).
- Repeat at the other corners.



2 screws at an angle. \*\*You can use 3 screws in a triangle if it's a 2x10".

- Make sure the 4ft board is "capping" the bed at both ends.

## TOOLS

### Step 2

\*If you need to cut wood:

- Saw, speed square, pencil + clamps
- Four 4x4 corner posts
- Two 2x6s or 2x10s that are 10ft (or 8ft) long
- 2 1/2 or 3" screws
- Drill with screw bit + drill bit
- 2 clamps