

good gardening
stories!

happiness is a raised bed

Jill Plumb imagined a world of family togetherness and fresh vegetables, and then made it happen

Monday nights on Twitter are a blast because that's when the gardeners come out to play. #gardenchat is a free-for-all of questions, answers and opinions from a virtual gang of gardeners.

Laura Matthews of New Cumberland, PA, who goes by the handle [@punkrockgardens](#), posted a topic last night that I'm keen on: "I think the shift from emphasizing tending plants to emphasizing tending soil is interesting."



A bed of good soil takes time to build—a raised bed, much less time. Don't get me wrong: good and fast are not always equal. But if you want to grow veggies now, it just so happens I agree with Jill Plumb that "Raised beds are the best way to guarantee the growing medium will be just right."



Jill invented the M Brace, a raised bed system that requires no nails, no construction. "Just a year ago," she says, "I was a high school teacher hanging out with my students in an afterschool program to help them improve their grades for graduation. Then I thought up the idea of the M Brace, a way to make raised garden

beds without using any tools. Long story short, I got the darned thing patented, and now it's out there in the marketplace, and actually selling!"

The product is both innovative and beautiful, and has had a personal impact on Jill's life. She dug up the grass in her backyard and installed raised beds using her own product, and that was when the idea really sprang to life. "The garden went in, built by our local DeVoDa Gardens. My friends there, Vonita and Deborah, are awesome women. They drew the most amazing plan for the most diverse vegetable garden I have ever seen:

artichokes, peppers (hot and mild), herbs, nasturtiums, strawberries, bazaar snake melons, lemon basil, eggplant, carrots, beets, green beans...and those amazing heirloom tomatoes."





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Jill's family now spends the first few moments of every morning in the garden, coffee cups in hand, joined by fat black bumblebees, shiny green hummingbirds, and their ancient English Setter, Trilby. Huge purple eggplants hang heavy on the vine, chewed-up strawberries (those pesky slugs!) lay among others perfect for picking. "My daughter, Claire, moves to the lemon basil, dead-heading the flowers so this plant she loves to cook with will endure just a few more weeks. I head for the green beans, pulling off the tenderest and popping them right into my mouth. My husband, Larry, stands at the garden gate, planning his next weeding run, making jokes about the snake melons. There is a profound sense of peace in this place; the sun is warm on our skin, and we linger without realizing it. Sometimes we find ourselves just staring, absorbing the buzzing, chirping, rustling life all around us. Our hearts have been fed, and another day begins. Thank you, garden."



Larry is enjoying the benefits of the garden thoroughly. "Everything we eat is really fresh, we know where it comes from, and we get to watch it grow every day. I'm the son of a farmer, so I have always seen vegetables as a commodity to sell, always worrying about rain and the price we would get for each crop. No worries now!" he says.



And now back to that soil issue: "I prefer a 50/50 mixture of organic compost and organic planting mix," says Jill. "Both can be bought at nurseries and garden centers by the bag and by the truckload. My favorite fertilizer is Fox Farm organic fertilizer. I see a huge difference when I use it. Try the Marine Cuisine Time Release."