



Inexpensive raised bed gardens were made by cutting old 55-gal. plastic barrels in half lengthwise, then screwing them onto 3-ft. tall wooden frames.

Raised Bed Gardens Made From Plastic Barrels

“Old 55-gal. plastic barrels cut in half lengthwise can be used to make inexpensive raised garden beds. They’re surprisingly attractive and offer a lot of benefits over conventional raised wood beds,” says Gordon Mariner, Goodlettsville, Tenn.

He screws the half barrels onto 3-ft. tall wooden frames made from 2 by 6 boards. There are 8 half-barrels lined up in 2 side by side rows. Mariner attached 2 by 6 boards across the tops of both frames, and also above the barrels where they’re joined together, to keep everything stable. He also drilled drain holes in the bottom of each barrel.

Mariner also made a handy roll-up tarp system over the raised garden beds, which his wife uses to protect plants during the cold winter months.

“My wife just turns a crank to roll the tarp up or down,” says Mariner. “She’s able to

grow crops outdoors all winter long such as tomatoes, beans, peas, strawberries and herbs.”

The roll-up tarp is attached to a horizontal metal pipe, which extends about 3 ft. above a 16-ft. long wooden frame made from 2 by 6 boards. The pipe runs through 2 by 6’s bolted vertically to each end of the frame. The tarp is screwed to a thin metal strap that screws onto the pipe, with a crank bolted to one end of the pipe.

Both ends of the frame are closed off by triangle-shaped pieces of tarp.

“We usually keep the tarp up during the summer, but during cool months we bring it down at night,” says Mariner.

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Lengths of 4-in. dia. perforated drain tile run across bottom of garden bed, acting as water reservoirs.



“SIP Beds” Keep Garden Watered

Jason Diehl’s sub-irrigated planting (SIP) beds guarantee that vegetables get all the water they need. No more and no less. The 16-in. deep wood planting beds have hidden “reservoirs” that allow him to go a week or more between watering, even during hot Oklahoma summers.

“I water the surface until plants get established, but once the roots set, they access the water that wicks up through the soil from below,” he says.

Several lengths of 4-in. dia. perforated drain tile run across the bottom of each bed, acting as the reservoirs. An inlet pipe at one end of the bed fills the drain pipes with water. An overflow pipe positioned just above the pipes drains away excess water.

“I attach a hose to the inlet pipe and let it run until water drains out the overflow,” says Diehl. “Even in the summer, I only

add water once a week. I use the SIP beds for plants like peppers and spinach that love unlimited water, but not deep-rooted plants like tomatoes.”

He uses 15 to 20 mil. pond liner plastic across the bottom and up the sides of the beds to contain the water. There’s about 12 in. of soil above the drain tiles.

Diehl has used 1/2-in. black plastic pipe for the overflow, but advises using 1-in. “The 1/2-in. doesn’t drain fast enough,” he says.

The SIP beds can be made any size with any type of sides. Diehl built his with 2 by 4’s.

“I’ve done a couple for myself on the ground and one on legs for my mother-in-law,” says Diehl. “They all work great.”

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Tree Caps use an umbrella-like design that supports netting above and around plant. Plastic-coated strut has slots for inserting 4 wire struts that hold up the material.



Tree Caps Work Like Umbrellas To Protect Fruit

Tree Caps keep birds, bugs and even bad weather away from fruit trees and bushes. Unlike most netting, which lays on the plant, the umbrella-like design of Tree Caps supports netting and other materials above and around the plant, not on it.

“The Tree Cap itself is a simple piece of hard plastic that fits over a length of pvc or metal pipe,” explains Samir Masri, Fruit Shield. “It has slots for inserting four, 4-mm wire struts that hold up the material. It can also be used in multiples on pipes with a wire running between them to support netting over a group or row of trees or plants. We use a UV stabilized polyethylene mesh fine enough to keep out most insect pests.”

Creating plant and row covers is a recent venture for Masri, who built a career in the fashion and textile industry. His first venture into agriculture came when he developed mesh bags to fit over date trees to catch fruit that falls off and keep pests away. The bags fit over the top with drawstrings to close the bag tight to the trunk.

When Florida citrus growers wanted to use the bags to protect young trees from the Asian citrus psyllid, Masri realized the bags were stressing the young trees. So he designed 25 by 25-in. and 36 by 36-in. square top bags with the Tree Caps to support them. The smaller bag is 60 in. long, and the larger bag is 72 in. long.

Masri is preparing to introduce pre-packs of Tree Caps, plastic coated struts, pipes and bags. Both pre-packs will include the Tree

Cap with struts sized to the square top bag. He has also developed a mini screen house using multiple tree caps and wires to support netting walls and ceiling. The 3 by 5-ft. by 6-ft. high screen house package will cost \$20 and include 4 Tree Caps, wires and eight, 3-ft. long pvc pipes.

While most of Masri’s products fit over the top of plants, his Fruit Catchers go underneath. Available in 8, 20 and 32-ft. square shapes, they tie to the trunk and overhead branches and start at \$15.99 for the 8 by 8-ft. square.

“The Fruit Catchers gently catch and protect fruit that falls,” says Masri. “They also catch leaves as they fall, making clean-up a once-a-season job.”

He notes that the netting can be power sprayed for cleaning and is unaffected by wet or dry conditions. It has a life expectancy of 5 to 7 years, depending on length of use and proper storage. Netting by the roll is priced at 15¢ per sq. ft. or cut to order for 18¢ per sq. ft. Bags start at \$1.75 for the 12 by 24-in. size used to protect clumps of almonds or raisin grapes to \$8.00 for the square top, 36 by 36-in. bags used with the Tree Caps. According to Masri, a recent redesign of the Tree Caps has resulted in a change in pricing. The new price will be available in the near future.

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