

There are advantages to raised bed gardening



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As I drive around, I am seeing more and more raised bed gardening. Raised beds can help where garden space is limited, the site is low and collects water, or the soil drains poorly. Raised beds are planting areas, where the soil is several inches higher than the natural grade. This is accomplished by adding soil to the growing area, or by adding and mixing into the native soil amendments such as compost, sand, and bark.

Where the native soil is adequate, raised beds can be made by removing several inches of soil from the area, filling the excavation with organic matter like manure or old hay, and mixing the soil with the added organic matter. It is also possible to pull soil from the walkways between beds and place it on the beds, filling the walkways with mulch materials like pine needles.

Raised beds can be framed with wood, bricks, or cement blocks, or they can be left unframed. Framing adds to the appearance, and depending on materials used, may provide seating.

Ideally, raised beds should be no wider than four feet (so you can easily reach the center from either side) and no longer than 25 feet, unless cross overs are provided. Beds four feet wide and 25 feet long contain 100 square feet and makes calculations for rates of application of fertilizer easier. Beds accessible from only one side should be narrower than 4 feet. All framed beds should be the same width so covering materials (shade frames) fit all ends, making rotations easy.

Raised-bed soil that has been improved by adding organic matter and sand often enables excellent root crops like carrots and onions to grow, even though they will not grow well in native soil. It is best to select vegetables that produce a lot for the space they occupy.

Raised beds require more water than ground-level beds, but when the alternative is no garden at all, it's worth the extra effort.

Some additional advantages of raised beds are: 1) raised beds produce more veggies per unit of garden space, because space is not wasted with walkway and space in between rows; 2) soil in raised beds dries more quickly, which permits earlier planting in the spring; and 3) soil does not compact, because



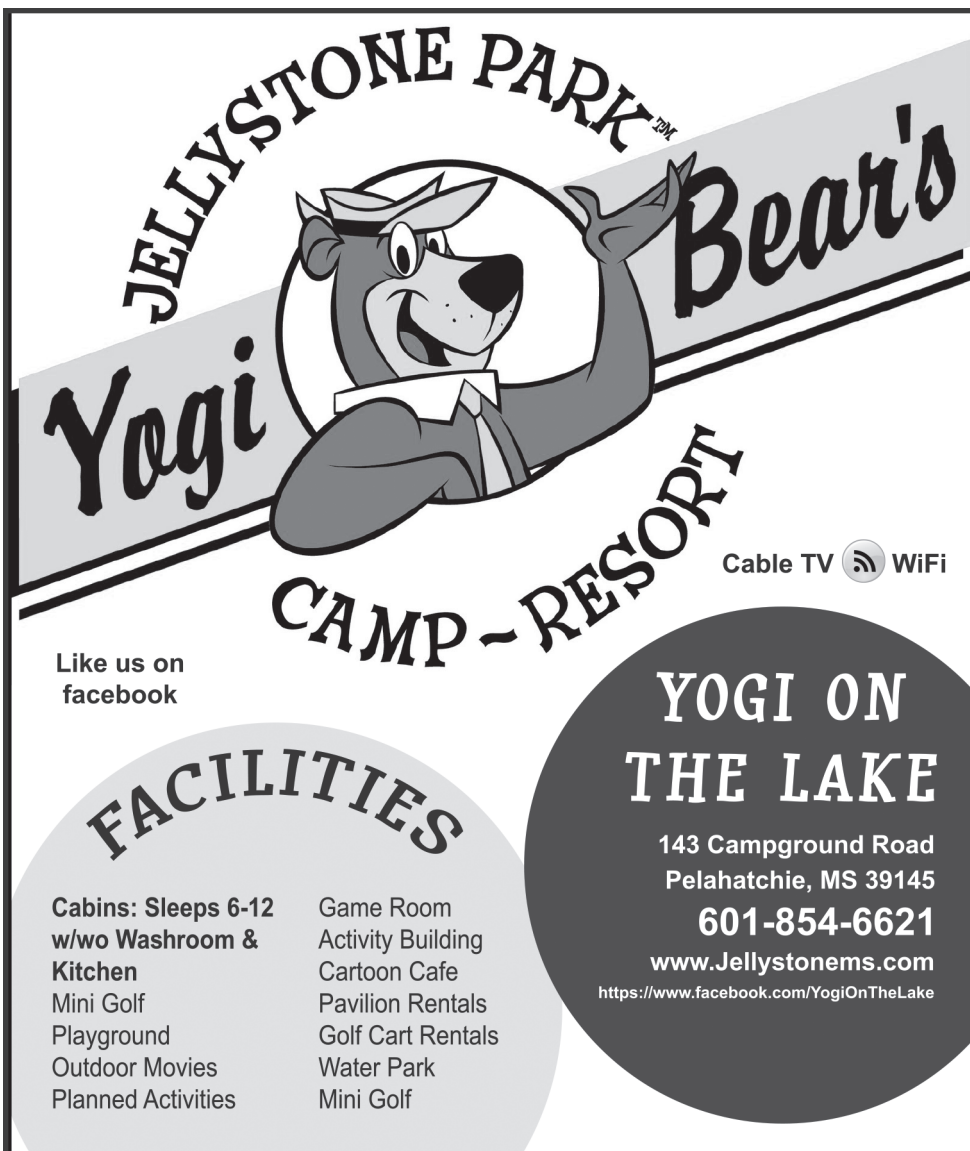
Photos by Pelahatchie News

Amy Till, a Pelahatchie resident, has squash, tomatoes, and okra in her raised bed gardens. She is also growing potatoes in tower style beds shown in the bottom photo.

the soil in the beds is not walked on.

Disadvantages of raised beds are: 1) closer spacing of plants reduces air flow and may increase disease problems; 2)

raised beds may require more frequent watering because of improved drainage; 3) raised beds with permanent sides make it difficult to relocate the garden; and 4) raised beds can be expensive to establish.



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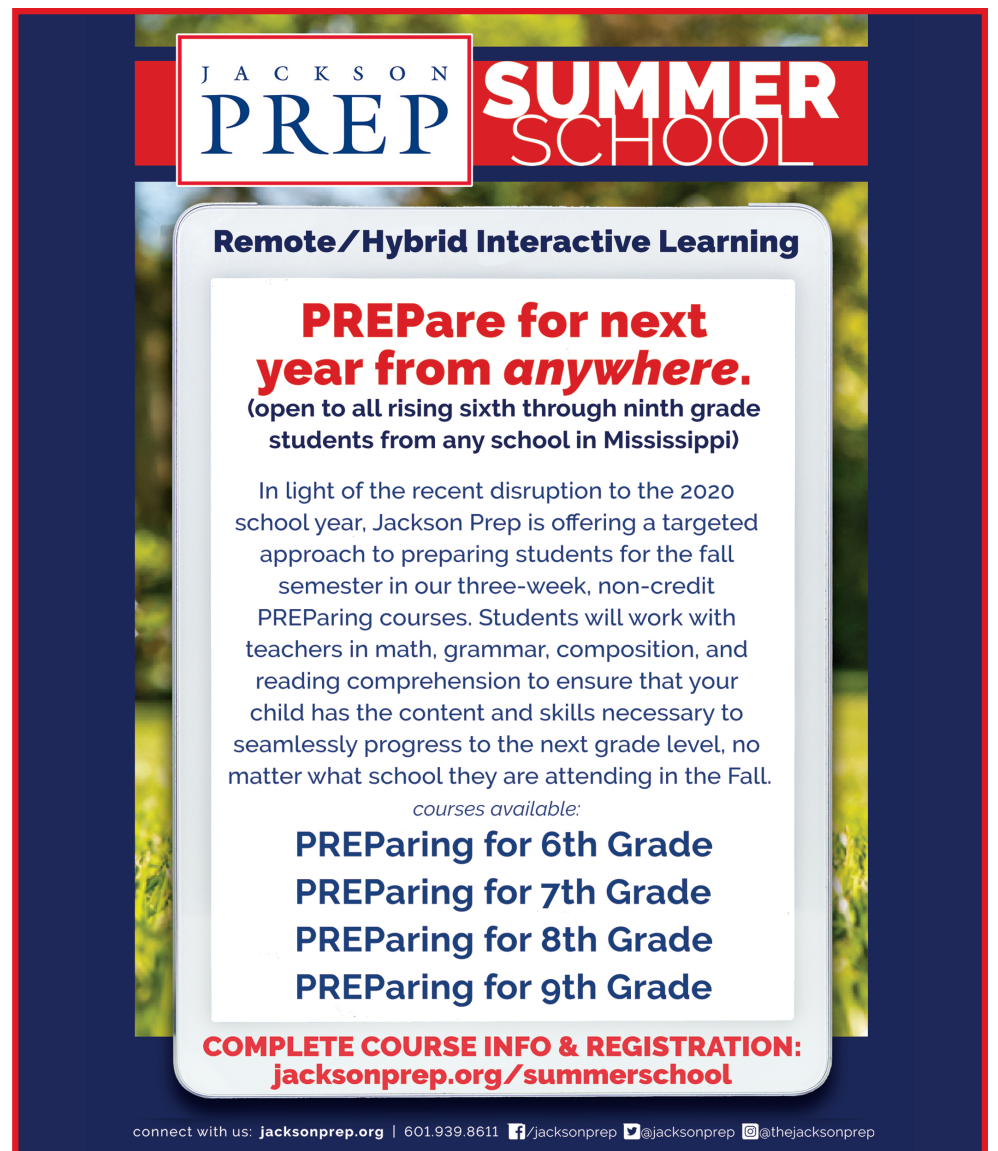
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