

Treated Wood for Raised Garden Beds

Wood that is put on, or in, the ground in Tennessee is at risk of rapid destruction due to rot and termite attack. For this reason, wood impregnated with protective chemicals (“treated wood”) is used for fence posts, deck supports and utility poles. This wood can also be used safely in gardens.

The treated wood that is available to homeowners in Tennessee is Southern pine treated with a copper-based preservative solution. The chemicals in treated wood are chemically bonded to the wood and studies have shown that relatively little preservative comes out (“leaches”) from the wood and into the surrounding soil. Furthermore, the chemicals that do leach from the wood do not move far and are not taken up by plants in a raised garden bed. Treated wood is very corrosive to metal, so ceramic-coated or stainless steel screws and nails should be used.

Despite that fact that studies have not shown any measurable danger in using treated wood in gardens, some people will still prefer to use untreated wood in areas such as gardens and decks. In these cases, naturally durable wood species such as cedar, black locust, white oak or cypress should be used. The heartwood (only) of these species contains naturally-occurring preservative chemicals that can protect the wood from rot and termites. If untreated, non-durable wood is used, it will need to be replaced frequently.

For more information, contact Adam Taylor at 865-946-1125 or AdamTaylor@utk.edu