

Hooray for Hügelkultur!

Homesteading is laborious and rewarding work; the list of things to do is long and may sometimes include activities like clear brush, rake leaves, turn compost, make new raised garden beds. What if there was such a thing that incorporated all these? Loosely translated 'hügelkultur' means 'mound culture' and is a process by which gardens can be quickly established. This process is adaptable to your site as it can be assembled on top of sod, on a hillside, dug down slightly so that the finished mound is not too high or placed wherever you need it most.

Using a base layer of wood, then twigs and branches, followed by subsequent layers of leaves, compost and other organic materials, topped with a layer of soil and finally, a bunch of mulch, a garden bed is born!

The finished mound should be approximately 3' wide and 6' long, the height along the centre can be 3' or so, depending on the size of the wood used as the base layer, whether you choose to start the mound on top of sod, or dig it down slightly, and your own preferences for the finished garden bed.

This technique has many advantages, one of which is using a surplus of dead branches and wood as a resource rather than as a disposal problem. Wood that is slightly rotten already is ideal, but it is OK to work with whatever you have got. Once buried beneath organic material, the wood decomposes quickly and over time, adds to the nutrients of the garden. Additionally, the wood will release moisture through the growing season and reduce or eliminate the need for irrigation. The decomposing activities within the mound release some heat and can help extend the growing season slightly. The orientation of the mound can create microclimates; a south facing side that is ideal for sun loving plants and a north facing side to nurture tender greens.

Hügelkultur saved the day for me many years ago when my family and I moved to an acreage in the bush. The majority of our time was spent preparing a site for our home, but as we worked along, there was an ample supply of materials with which to efficiently compile a vegetable garden. Our garden was on a hillside and so when the mounds were prepared, they followed the contour of the hill and on the high side of the mound, a bit of a trench was dug to help direct water into the bed, to create what is known as a swale. For the first few years we did not have water on site per se, and so relied on the moisture within the bed and augmented this periodically by hand watering using water collected in a rain barrel.

Over the last 10 years as our property has changed with the introduction of wood sheds and chicken coops, the last of the original hügelkultur beds has disappeared. With spring upon us and the earth awakening once more, I am eyeing the pile of rotting poplar with excitement. I foresee a few new garden beds, ones that I expect will require little attention once planted except for savoring the harvest, I also foresee a new shed so it's time to start looking around at places like [EasyShed Garden Shed](#) manufacturers and see if I can find something that will be practical. Have a look around at the resources available to you, make a mound and enjoy!

Submitted by Celene McClintock