

Twilight Meeting: Permanent Raised Beds  
Thursday, November 14, 2019  
3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Fat Peach Farm  
181 Drew Road Madbury, NH 03823



#### Establishment

- Mowed sod as short as possible
- Smothered sod with 10 cm (4") of hardwood chips
  - Preferably **ramail wood chips**, or the twigs and branches of deciduous trees/shrubs, no more than 7 cm (2.7") in diameter. Ramail chips have a higher ratio of cambium to cellulose than other wood chips (i.e., more nutrients), and create a better environment for fungi growth and soil organic matter formation.
- Built beds roughly 81 cm (32") wide, using **weed seed free compost**, and 46 cm (18") between rows

#### Challenges

- We learned that it takes one full year for the wood chips to breakdown and for the compost to "become soil" (i.e., for a thriving soil ecosystem to develop). During the first year, cash crops **did not** fare well. We started sowing cover crops after new areas were developed, and planting cash crops in subsequent years.
- The beds start to flatten out over time and need to be re-shaped periodically.

#### Benefits

- The only weeds that show up in quantity are introduced into the system from the top down (e.g., blown in, or deposited from previous crop). Fewer weeds = less time weeding = more time for other farm chores!
- Permanent raised bed systems are a form of regenerative agriculture that builds soil organic matter and sequesters carbon.

#### Tips

- Get a soil test before and after establishment.
- Because beds don't produce well the first year, transition areas over time.
- Don't let any weeds go to seed! It's easy when weeding requires only an hour or two/week.
- Use silage tarp to prep beds (warms the soil, weed seeds germinate then die due to lack of sunlight).
- When cleaning out crops after harvest, instead of pulling out plants with extensive root systems (e.g., tomato plants), cut each plant at the soil level so as not to disturb the soil and buried weed seeds. Roots breakdown over winter/early spring and are easy to incorporate/remove at planting the following year.

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