

840 Gardener Dr
Louisville, KY 40201

October 23, 2013

Jefferson County Cooperative Extension
Attn: Master Gardener
645 Horse Track Pl
Louisville, KY 40201

Dear Master Gardener,

After four years of planting my vegetable garden in the same raised beds, I have noticed a definite decline in the health of the plants and the amount of produce harvested. I plant the same thing in each bed year after year. I usually add mulch in the spring before I plant. I really don't understand because the first two years were incredible. I had bumper crops of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, kale, swiss chard, onions and summer squash.

One of my neighbors told me that I should contact you. She had seen the Master Gardener's booth at the Farmer's Market and had overheard someone asking questions about what they should be doing now in preparation for next spring. I would appreciate any suggestions you might have.

Sincerely,

Daisy Smith

You are a Master Gardener with the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Office in Louisville, KY. It is your responsibility to respond in writing to any inquiries regarding horticulture related problems. Questions involving vegetable gardens are very common. You suspect from the information provided that the problem is related to a depletion of soil nutrients and the need to rotate crops. To answer the question, you turn to the Kentucky Cooperative Extension bulletin – "Raised Bed Gardening". Below are items you can include in your response to Daisy Smith:

1. Suggest that she take a soil test first. Fall is the best time to do the soil test. If soil pH needs adjusting or slow acting materials such as phosphorous or potassium needs to be added, they should be worked into the soil in the Fall in order that the nutrients will be available in the Spring.
2. Rotate 25 percent of their bed space into cover crop each year. Use of cool season legumes such as hairy vetch or Austrian winter peas help replenish organic matter to beds each winter. In the summer, use buckwheat or cowpeas in beds that are in rotation.
3. Be sure to rotate vegetables from within like families to avoid buildup of pests in the soil. Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant should all be moved to a new location each year because they are related and share the same problems.
4. Be sure to side dress heavy feeders such as onions, tomatoes, and cole crops before they flower or begin bearing.