there are many ways to grow food and flowers vertically, but the obelisk is a garden classic. In a front yard, you might typically find one supporting some gorgeous flowering annual or perennial. But the stately, classy obelisk is a great way to sneak food plants into a traditional perennial garden.

In the backyard, you might feel okay with using more basic supports, like stakes and twine—I’ve seen people use hockey sticks to stake tomatoes—or those standard metal tomato cages that get all bent out of shape each year the moment you try to stick them in the ground. But there’s something more sophisticated about a painted wooden obelisk.

If you don’t have a DIY project in you, there are a great many obelisk styles, both new and antique, that will add impact to a front yard garden. They are often a sturdy wrought iron with some type of flourish—unless you’re looking simply at the humble tomato cage. But back to the wooden variety—they are usually a nice triangular shape, tapered at the top and sometimes capped with a fancy finial. Look for wooden finials crafted to go on fence posts.

This obelisk looks fancy, but only requires three tools to build it: a saw, a drill, and a carpenter’s square. There is a bit of adjusting required to get the top to line up well. Depending on the length of the 2 x 2” (5.1 x 5.1 cm) pieces of wood, adjust the height to whatever you need it to be. This project stands at 72” (182.9 cm) tall without the finial. You can shorten it according to your preference. We left a bit of length to be able to anchor the obelisk in the ground.

Do choose a rot-resistant wood, like hemlock or cedar. Your new favorite elegant garden accessory will last longer, allowing you to place it where it’s needed in the garden from year to year. This one was also given a coat of outdoor paint. Its home is in a side yard, visible from the street, where it’s holding up some unruly raspberry canes.

**MATERIALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2” x 2” x 8’ (5.1 x 5.1 cm x 2.4 m) boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1” x 2” x 8’ (2.5 x 5.1 cm x 2.4 m) boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb</td>
<td>2” (5.1 cm) screws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb</td>
<td>2½” (6.4 cm) deck screws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4d galvanized finish nails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Finial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>Outdoor paint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOOLS**

- Tape measure
- Pencil
- Saw (handsaw, jigsaw, or circular)
- Carpenter’s square
- Clamps
- Drill
- Drill bits including a countersink bit
- Eye and ear protection
- Work gloves
PUTTING IT TOGETHER

1. Measure the top of each leg. Mark the tops of the four legs for trimming. Each leg top should be trimmed so it has two beveled faces that meet in a point; then, trim them to length. Using a carpenter’s square, mark a wedge shape on two adjoining faces at the top. The wedge should be 1” (2.5 cm) wide at a point 5” (12.7 cm) down from the top of the leg. Then, using a straightedge, extend all four lines all the way to the edge of the workpiece. This will create two wedge shapes between 6 and 7” (15.2 and 17.8 cm) long. The old adage of measure twice and cut once applies here, as it can be a tricky process.

2. Using a handsaw, cut off one of the wedges to create a wedge-shaped waste piece. Flip your workpiece a quarter turn and cut off the other wedge. To finish trimming the leg tops, make a crosscut that follows the two 1” (2.5 cm) cutting lines you drew. This will leave a top that is 1 x 1” (2.5 x 2.5 cm) and is angled so it will be level when the legs are equally spread out in the garden.

3. Make the other tops the same way. When you’re finished, the four legs should fit together to form a flat 2 x 2” (5.1 x 5.1 cm) top with the leg bottoms 24” (61 cm) apart.

4. Make the leg frames. Space an obelisk leg pair 24” (61 cm) apart from outside to outside at the bottom and clamp or wedge them between two pieces of wood spaced to 24” (61 cm) apart.

Cut a 1 x 2” (2.5 x 5.1 cm) to 22” (55.9 cm) long, lay it across the legs 12” (30.5 cm) from the bottom, and mark and cut the 1 x 2” (2.5 x 5.1 cm) flush with the legs. Fasten with 2” (5.1 m) screws driven through pilot holes. Cut and fasten another crosspiece 16” (40.6 cm) above the lower crosspiece (center to center). Join the tops of the 2 x 2” (5.1 x 5.1 cm) legs with a 2 1/2” (6.4 cm) screw. Remove the assembled leg pair so you can repeat this step for the other two obelisk legs.

Use a carpenter’s square to mark diagonal cutting lines at the tops of the legs.
An old-fashioned handsaw does as a good a job as a power tool for trimming the leg tops.

5. Use a clamp to hold the pieces together and space the legs 24” (61 cm) apart. Mark two more sets of crosspieces, this time cutting them flush with the 1 x 2s (2.5 x 5.1 cm). Fasten them to the 2 x 2s (5.1 x 5.1 cm) that are already installed, using screws driven through predrilled pilot holes. Screw the four tops together. If you want the 1 x 2s (2.5 x 5.1 cm) to match perfectly at the corners, make compound miter cuts on the ends. Trace the leg on a horizontal 1 x 2” (2.5 x 5.1 cm), then draw a 45-degree line from both the top and bottom of the line, connect them on the face of the 1 x 2” (2.5 x 5.1 cm), and cut that angle. Crosspieces can be placed according to preference.

6. Add the finial to the top. If you’re using a standard finial from a home center, drill a hole for the integral lag screw in the center of the top and thread it in. If your finial doesn’t come with an integral lag screw, nail and glue the finial to the tops of the posts.

7. Apply paint or stain to preserve the wood and make it stand out or blend in to the garden. Use a carpenter’s square to mark diagonal cutting lines at the tops of the legs.
The obelisk in this project stands about 5’ (1.5 m) tall, including the rounded finial on top. The base measures 24 x 24” (61 x 61 cm). The base for the finial has a diameter of 2 ¾” (7 cm), so the 2 x 2” (5.1 x 5.1 cm) posts both need to be 1” (2.5 cm) square at the top to provide a solid base and to cover the end grains.

The sides slope outward by 1’ (30.5 cm) for every 5 vertical feet (1.5 m). You can alter the dimensions of your version by revising the numbers.

Simply divide the side of the obelisk into two right triangles. Half of the 24” (61 cm) base is 12” wide x 5’ tall (30.5 cm x 1.5 m), which means it slopes 12” (30.5 cm) for every 5’. If you want your obelisk to be 3’ wide x 6’ tall (0.9 x 1.8 M), the slope changes to 1 ½’ (0.5 m) for every 6’ (1.8 m). Therefore, change the measurements on the square to 1 ½” (3.8 cm) and 6” (15.2 cm).

Additional projects can be found in:

Gardening Your Front Yard
Projects and Ideas for Big and Small Spaces
By Tara Nolan
ISBN: 9780760364864
Hardcover, 208 pages
$30.00 US/ $39.00 CAN
Now Available!

A finial tops this obelisk, adding a regal finish. Wood glue was used to attach it to the base and finishing nails were used to reinforce it further.
When I give my raised bed talk to garden clubs and horticultural societies, I display an image of two narrow raised beds made of painted corrugated steel placed in a side yard. More than one person has told me they look like two window wells attached. I love the look of corrugated steel, so that got me thinking . . . what if I bought two window wells and joined them together to make a raised bed?

I quickly discovered that the window well edges (at least on the examples I found at a local big box store) would not really attach easily and seamlessly. But, as I stood there trying to figure out what to do, I thought to myself, “What if I could attach one window well to a piece of wood, to make sort of a semi-circular raised bed?”

Wandering back to the lumber, I discovered that one metal window well was the exact height of a piece of a 1x12" (2.5 x 30.5 cm) piece of wood!

As noted in the Live-Edge Raised Bed project (page 114), gardening in raised beds offers green thumbs a variety of benefits (extended growing season, accessibility, overcoming roots and compact or poor soil, etc.). And, the great thing about raised beds is you can build them to be whatever size works with your space. I figured the narrow shape of this raised bed would fit perfectly in my side yard garden between my garage windows, where the soil is very poor, despite my best efforts to amend it, and bindweed grows with abandon, despite my best efforts to tame it.

My side yard garden gets a LOT of sun, so veggies thrive there. You can place your window well raised bed anywhere that gets six to eight hours of sun per day (less if you plant veggies that don’t mind a bit of shade, like greens—lettuce, spinach, etc. and beets). My first season growing in this garden, I dug in three pepper plants that absolutely flourished.

This is a very easy project, even for someone who doesn’t have woodworking skills. If you don’t have a way to cut wood, many lumberyards will size it for you. Then all that is left to do is attach it to the window well, fill it with soil, and plant and water.
PUTTING IT TOGETHER

1. Place the window well on top of the wood and predrill holes in the "low" parts of the corrugated steel.

2. Attach the window well to the wood using the screws.

WINDOW-WELL PLANTING OPTIONS

Though you’re not going to plant a prize-winning pumpkin or a bumper crop of zucchini in this smaller raised bed, there are plenty of other options. Mine hold three big pepper plants. Remember, if you’re planting peppers and tomatoes, you’ll have to stake them, rather than place cages overtop, as the window well isn’t quite wide enough to accommodate a tomato cage.

It is deep enough for root veggies, like carrots, turnips, and beets. You could even plant a decent onion harvest. If you placed a trellis behind it, you could plant climbers, like peas, beans, or cucumbers. Consider planting perennial herbs, like thyme, chives, and oregano. These will come back every year. Or, switch it up with different annuals each year—cilantro, dill, or whatever you use the most!

Drill your screws through the window well into the wood in the dips of the corrugated steel.

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