

# Grow WYO: Recycle old concrete for functional backyard visual

By Tom Heald, for the Star-Tribune | Posted: Tuesday, July 6, 2010



This raised bed was built using concrete pieces to form the wall. Note the concrete is smooth side up and the concrete pieces are over lapping. (Photo by Tom Heald)

Raised beds are all the rage -- whether for growing vegetables or creating visually appealing flower and shrub displays.

A vast array of preformed retaining wall kits are available at any lumber store or nursery. But I like to do things on the cheap, while still having my projects look like a million bucks. To do this, I use discarded concrete.

There seems an endless supply of broken up concrete in Wyoming. Plenty is in barrow ditches, and it's free for the taking. I search out rectangular sized pieces I can easily handle; some can be longer and wider than others. I limit the size by its weight, which for me is no heavier than 50 pounds. I load it in my pickup bed.

Choose the largest pieces of concrete for the first tier; configure them so there are only small spaces between blocks. These will support the smaller concrete pieces as they are added. You can lay the concrete blocks smooth-side-up or turn them over to expose the rock aggregate. I like the aggregate-- it gives it a rock feel to the wall.



Be sure to lay the second-tier blocks about one-half inch back from the edge of the first tier. Think of it as building a pyramid and will help strengthen the wall. Place the second-tier pieces so they overlap and partially cover two of the first tier's pieces. This helps tie them in.

Continue this process with the next tier, moving the concrete pieces slightly back and overlapping the pieces below.

Using liquid iron to stain the concrete will further enhance the wall. Apply the liquid iron, available at most nurseries, liberally on the concrete pieces letting it run off over the edge. Staining is permanent, be sure to not get the liquid iron on other structures you don't want stained. This will give the staining effect of canyon walls with streaking that took eons to make. You can do it in a couple of minutes.

Once completed, you'll have a retaining wall to be proud of and all it cost was some sweat equity.

\* Look here each week for Grow WYO, a column devoted to gardening in Wyoming's sometimes tricky climate. Tom Heald is a University of Wyoming Extension Educator. You can contact him at 307-235-9400 or [theald@natronacounty-wy.gov](mailto:theald@natronacounty-wy.gov).