4x8 Garden Bed Comparison

Steel vs cedar vs wall block. A contractor, built-from-scratch comparison.



STEEL NPS

11 gauge Corten · about 32 sq ft planted



CEDAR

2x6 with 4x4 posts · about 29 sq ft planted



MINI-CRETA

Wall block + cap · about 15 sq ft planted

All three customer prices are fair market installed prices. Freight extra on NPS.

November 10, 2026

What you're comparing

Three ways to build the same 4 ft by 8 ft outside footprint, in the same backyard.



STEEL NPS

- 11 gauge Corten modular panels, about 1/8 in thick
- No cap, no trench — level the spot and bolt it together
- About 32 sq ft of planting area inside the 4x8



CEDAR

- Built from scratch: 2x6 boards and 4x4 corner posts
- About 10 years in wet soil, then a rebuild
- About 29 sq ft of planting area — close to steel, still wood



MINI-CRETA

- A real hardscape wall with a flat architectural cap
- Walls about 10 in thick — a footing trench and a full base
- About 15 sq ft of planting area, roughly half the soil

The 18 inch bed, side by side

Fair market installed price. Steel is shown before freight.

STEEL NPS

THE CREW-JOB WINNER

FAIR MARKET INSTALLED PRICE

$2,363.81

Installed, before freight

CREW HOURS ON SITE

2.5

Same morning

PLANTING AREA INSIDE THE 4X8

32 sq ft

Slim 11 gauge walls

LIKELY LIFE SPAN

20–30 yrs

Not a warranty

COST PER YEAR

$79–$118/yr

Lowest cost per year

CEDAR

Lower first invoice

FAIR MARKET INSTALLED PRICE

$1,867.15

Lower on day one

CREW HOURS ON SITE

6

About a half day

PLANTING AREA INSIDE THE 4X8

29 sq ft

2x lumber is 1.5 in thick

LIKELY LIFE SPAN

About 10 yrs

In wet soil, then a rebuild

COST PER YEAR

$187/yr

Installed price ÷ 10

MINI-CRETA

A permanent hardscape wall

FAIR MARKET INSTALLED PRICE

$5,888.63

Built from scratch

CREW HOURS ON SITE

29.1

About a 2-day job

PLANTING AREA INSIDE THE 4X8

15 sq ft

Walls about 10 in thick

LIKELY LIFE SPAN

25–50 yrs

If the base and drainage are built right

COST PER YEAR

$118–$236/yr

On a 25–50 year life range

The 24 inch bed, side by side

Fair market installed price. Steel is shown before freight.

STEEL NPS

THE CREW-JOB WINNER

FAIR MARKET INSTALLED PRICE

$3,244.48

Installed, before freight

CREW HOURS ON SITE

3

Same morning

PLANTING AREA INSIDE THE 4X8

32 sq ft

Slim 11 gauge walls

LIKELY LIFE SPAN

20–30 yrs

Not a warranty

COST PER YEAR

$108–$162/yr

Lowest cost per year

CEDAR

Lower first invoice

FAIR MARKET INSTALLED PRICE

$2,285.06

Lower on day one

CREW HOURS ON SITE

8

About a half day

PLANTING AREA INSIDE THE 4X8

29 sq ft

2x lumber is 1.5 in thick

LIKELY LIFE SPAN

About 10 yrs

In wet soil, then a rebuild

COST PER YEAR

$229/yr

Installed price ÷ 10

MINI-CRETA

A permanent hardscape wall

FAIR MARKET INSTALLED PRICE

$7,553.92

Built from scratch

CREW HOURS ON SITE

38.8

About 2.5 days

PLANTING AREA INSIDE THE 4X8

15 sq ft

Walls about 10 in thick

LIFE SPAN

25–50 yrs

If the base and drainage are built right

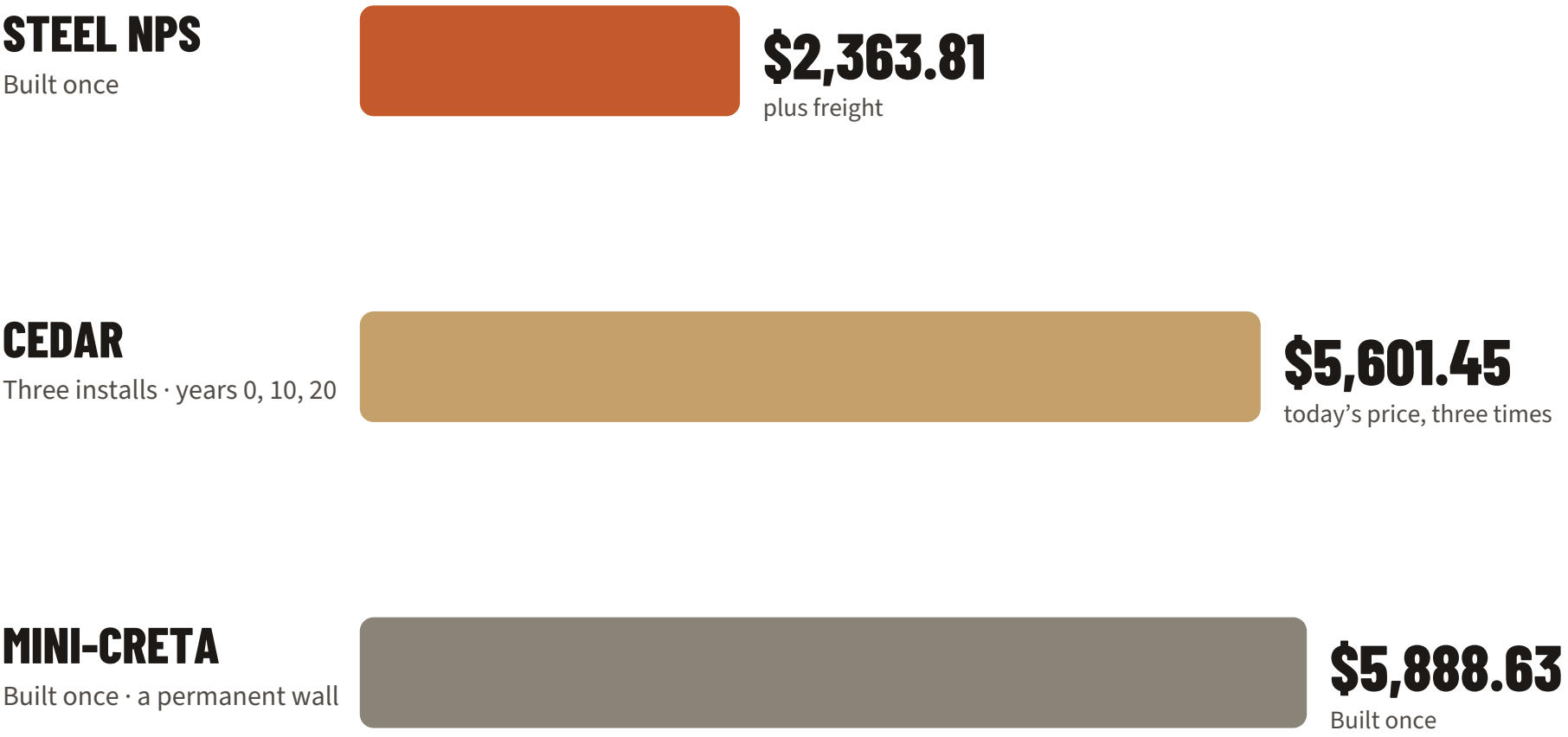
COST PER YEAR

$151–$302/yr

On a 25–50 year life range

25-year cost of ownership · 18 inch

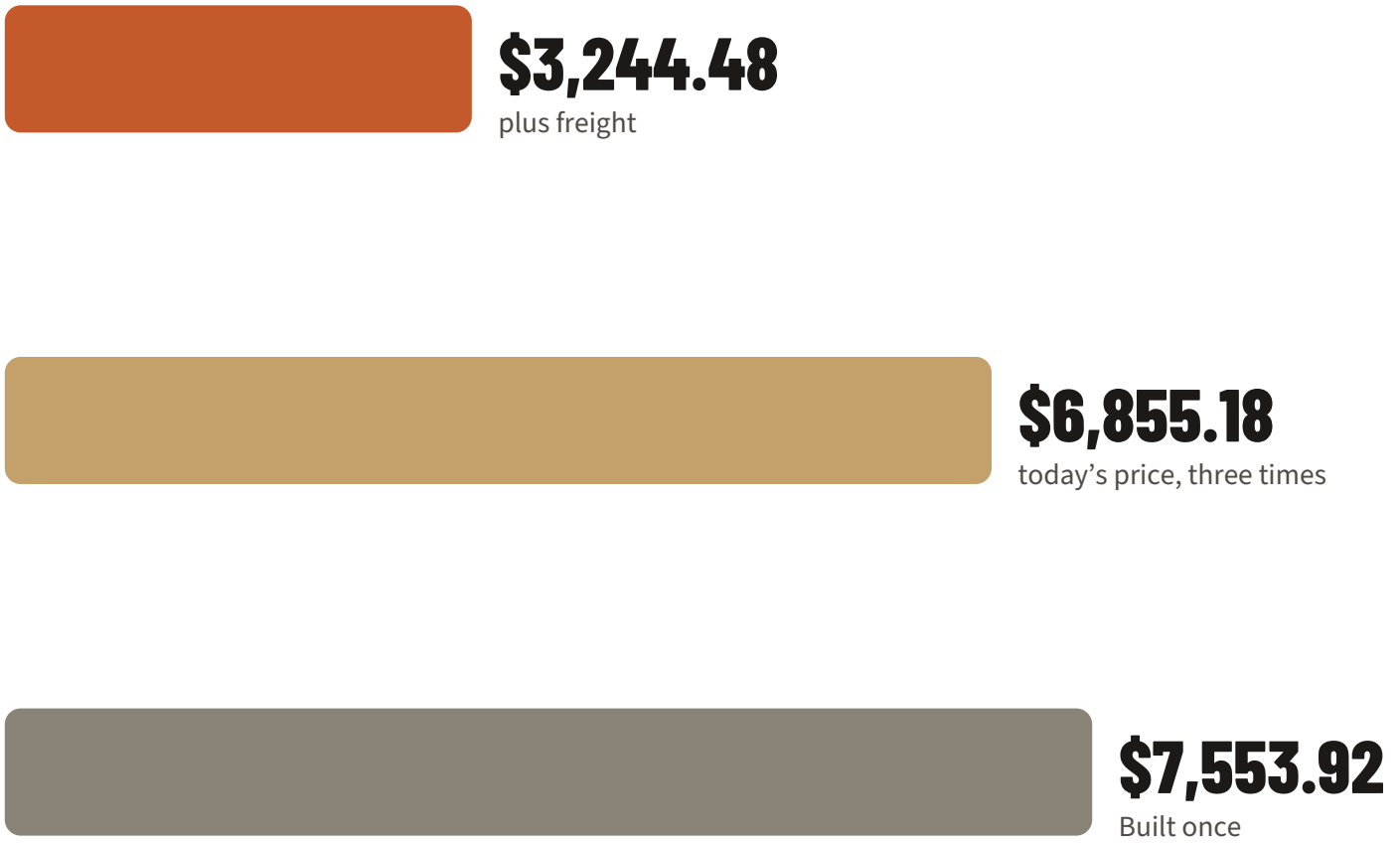
Cedar is built again at years 10 and 20, at today's price. One steel bed. One Mini-Creta wall. Totals ignore inflation, freight, and tearing out a planted bed.



One NPS bed, $2,363.81 plus freight, versus $5,601.45 for three cedar installs.

25-year cost of ownership · 24 inch

Cedar is built again at years 10 and 20, at today's price. One steel bed. One Mini-Creta wall. Totals ignore inflation, freight, and tearing out a planted bed.



One NPS bed, $3,244.48 plus freight, versus $6,855.18 for three cedar installs.

Crew hours on the 18 inch bed

A steel bed is a same-morning install. Mini-Creta is a real hardscape job.

STEEL NPS

Same morning · level, unpack, bolt, and go



2.5 man-hours

CEDAR

3.5 hours back versus NPS, still a half day



6 man-hours

MINI-CRETA

26.6 hours back versus NPS · about 2 days for a two-person crew



29.1 man-hours

26.6 crew hours saved per bed versus Mini-Creta

That’s $2,394 of billed time at $90/hr, back for other jobs.

What the 4x8 actually plants

The outside footprint is 4 ft by 8 ft on every bed. Wall thickness decides how much soil you get.

STEEL NPS

Walls about 1/8 in thick

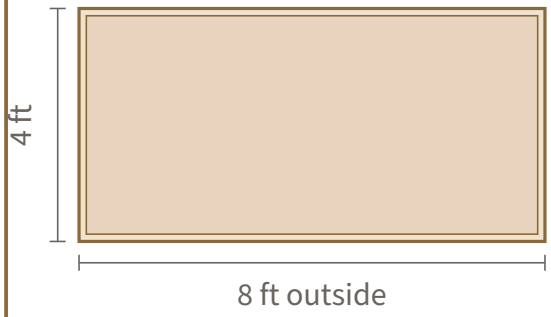


32 sq ft

Almost the full 4x8 of soil

CEDAR

Walls 1.5 in thick

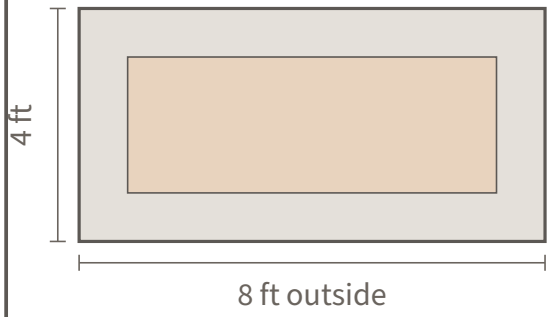


29 sq ft

Close to steel, still wood

MINI-CRETA

Walls about 10 in thick



15 sq ft

About half the soil is gone

Why the NPS steel bed wins on a crew job

Cedar still wins the first invoice. NPS wins the years, the hours, the soil, and the look.

1. **11 gauge Corten**
   About 1/8 in thick and stiff enough at this size that the bed does not need a footing, mortar, or a gravel trench. Level a spot, bolt it, and fill it.

2. **No rebuilds**
   11 gauge Corten should last 20 to 30 years — not a warranty. Cedar, in wet soil, is about 10 years, then the crew is back.

3. **No rot, clean lines**
   The steel stays a slim, continuous wall — rusted Corten or a powder-coated finish — instead of a wood frame that grays, checks, and fails.

4. **Fast install**
   A same-morning install: level the spot, unpack, and bolt it together. Mini-Creta is a two-day hardscape job.

5. **More growing space**
   About 32 sq ft of soil inside the same 4x8. Cedar is about 29. Mini-Creta walls eat the bed down to about 15 sq ft, roughly half.

Honest, on day one

A contractor-built cedar 4x8 is still the lowest first invoice: $1,867.15 at 18 in, which is $496.66 less than NPS, before freight. If a client wants the lowest first check and accepts a rebuild in a decade, cedar wins the cash comparison. NPS wins the hours, the look, a little more planting area, and the long-term math once that rebuild and the cost per year are counted. Block can outlast steel if the base is built right. The trade is life plus a full hardscape install, a much higher customer price, about half the planting area, and a wall that cannot be moved.