May 2020 Webinar: "Hands-on" Tomato Trellising

Quarter Acre Farm
providing certified organic vegetables & seedlings with agricultural expertise
About the Farmer

• Andrea Davis-Cetina, Owner/Operator

• Grew up in rural Harford County

• Studied sustainable agriculture and local food systems at Hampshire College

• Have been working on farms since 2001

• BFTP level 2 grad and currently in level 3

• AgBiz Masters 2019-2020
About Quarter Acre Farm

• Started in 2008 in Sonoma, CA
• 2019 first season growing in Tilghman, ES of MD
• Organic vegetables & seedlings *(certified by CCOF since 2010)*
• Specialize in heirloom tomatoes, pumpkins, winter squash, popcorn, a wide range of seedlings, & some value-added products.
• Mostly sell direct-to-consumer at farmers’ markets, but this year also online sales and delivery (COVID)
• Use regenerative growing methods: no pesticides, herbicides, or petroleum-based products
• ½ acre in production, only worker is owner
Common Mistakes to Avoid

• Letting plants get too big before trellising
• Using weak materials, your trellis system needs to be sturdy
• Fear and worry, just give it a try and find your own style
Common Methods

• Generally referred to as the Florida Weave, a loose term where the idea is to sandwich your plants between two lengths of twine.
Tools & Materials

• 6 foot t-posts
• 5 ft electric conduit stakes (or other sturdy stakes which can be taller)
• baling twine
• pruners (or scissors)
• fence post driver
My Method

• One t-post on each end of the bed & two t-post in the middle of the bed evenly spaced apart.

• Then I put electric conduit stakes in line with the plants every two plants.
Here they are all together!
Cost of Materials for 1 bed
(not counting tomato plants, irrigation, or labor)

Bed size: approximately 130 feet long x 2 feet wide. Walkway is 2-3 feet wide.

- Four 6ft t-posts at $3.69 each = $14.76
- Twenty Six 5ft electric conduit stakes at $2.77 each = $72.02
- 780 ft of baling twine at 0.004 per foot = $3.12
- Three bales of straw at $5 each = $15

TOTAL COST = $104.90*

*NOTE all the materials except the straw is a one time purchase. I'm literally still using the same baling twine I purchased 10 years ago.
• Next I take baling twine and tightly tie & knot it to a t-post at the end of the bed.

• Then I run the twine on one side of the two tomato plants and loop around the conduit stake pulling tightly.

• For the next two tomato plants I run the twine on the other side of the plants and loop around the next stake, zig zagging my way down the bed.
• When I get to the end of the bed I wrap the twine around the end of the t-post twice and head back down the bed.

• This time I am running the twine of the opposite side so that the tomatoes are now being held up by twine on both sides.

• When I get to the t-post that I started with I cut and tightly tie and knot the twine and the trellis is complete for now.
I will make another pass in about a week or when the tomatoes have grown about 12 inches.

Each bed ideally gets trellised about 3 times or until I reach the top of the conduit stakes.
Considerations, *part 1*

- I use drip tape for irrigation, 6 or 8 mil with emitters every 8 inches
- Tomatoes are spaced 24 inches apart
- I grow a variety of tomatoes with different days to maturity
- 3 plantings of tomatoes: ideally end of April, mid-May, and mid-June
- Am experimenting for the 2nd year with one tray of grafted tomatoes
Considerations, *part 2*

- **Mulching System** - Thick layer of straw with newspaper around the base of the plant to help with weed control. This year I'm testing out paper mulch for the first time.

- **Variety Selection** - I only use certified organic seeds because as an organic grower I think it is important to grow plants that came from seed that was produced using organic methods. I read through seed descriptions and select varieties that work for my market: mixed colors, larger size fruit, and great for fresh eating.
Resources

Supplies
• Electric conduit: Lowes
• Baling Twine: ask at a local feed supply store
• T-posts: Tractor Supply
• Fence driver: Tractor Supply

Tomato Seeds
• Fedco Seeds
• High Mowing
• Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

Books I Have Found Helpful
• How to Grow More Vegetables by John Jeavons
• New Organic Grower by Eliot Coleman
• Growing Food in a Hotter, Drier Land by Gary Paul Nabhan

Grafted Tomato Transplants
• Johnny’s Seeds
Contact Info

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- Feel free to email me any questions about tomatoes and I will do my best to answer them
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