



GROWING

TOMATOES



TOMATOES

The Tomato Trellis Project

Sponsored by
Comal County Master Gardeners
and
The CMG Trainee Class of 2025

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Dedicated To Emmy L L Green
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New Braunfels, TX

Background

On February 26, 2025 a handful of Master Gardeners and Trainees constructed The Tomato Trellis within the Demonstration Bed Number 4 at the Comal Master Gardeners Rose and Veggie Demonstration Garden.

Before we review the trellis as solution, some actual background on growing tomatoes in CENTRAL Texas. New comers to gardening in Central Texas typically expect growing tomatoes to be easy, and just as typically, they learn otherwise. The trellis idea was explored as an approach that addresses some of the issues in that expectation gap.

Growth Habit

Temperature Ranges

Easy of Maintenance & Harvest

Grow Habit, in tomatoes and many other night-shade plants is either determinate, or indeterminate. The first will grow to an expected maximum size, then produce and ripen all of the fruits on a more or less pre-determined date. Typically reaching a maximum height of 3 - 5 feet.

The later grows without a built-in end date, it will grow and produce as long as necessary conditions continue. These vines easily grow a foot per week when in vigorous growth mode. Growth Habit for tomatoes is basically the same for both types, they are vines that can branch at each new leaf node and typically set a flower/fruit bracket between leaf nodes. New branches are called "suckers". Tomato plants are soft vines that are not self supporting, but also do not like to be on the ground when actively growing. How to support growth and pruning out suckers, or not, are training approach decisions.

Temperature Ranges, for tomato plants the temperature range for growth is wide, from nearly freezing to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Vigorous growth occurs in a range of about 65 - 95F. For flowers to pollinate and fruit to set, the temperature must remain between a 75f night time low and a 95f day time high. In short, tomatoes love having a long mild summer, especially the indeterminate varieties. Central Texas does not offer that to the would be tomato grower. The expected monthly average temperature forecasts look promising, but the actual weather temperatures that arrive are highly variable compared to averages.

Easy of Maintenance & Harvest, for determinate tomatoes is simple with right-sized cages. The plant grows to fill up the cage, the fruit ripens, it is harvested, the plant is removed, Indeterminate tomato plants growing a foot per week, after a 14 week period will be 14 feet long. A 14 foot tall cage is not a practical solution. For indeterminate tomato plant varieties, only the newest 3 - 4 feet of growth is actively producing tomatoes. At the top of the plant a new leaf node and fruit bracket forms, the fruit is already formed on the one the below it, and on the one below that, fruit is ripening on another bracket. So, ideally that 3 - 4 feet of the plant would always be in easy reach. Commercial growers solved this with a system called Lower and Lean. In this method strings are held overhead on spools and the vines are clipped on the the strings as the plant grows. As it continues to grow up, more string is released from the spool and the and the spool is moved horizontally so the that the vine is leaning, and eventually it will trail the stem behind it on the ground.

So therefore, The Tomato Trellis Project was initiated to explore and demonstrated the Lower and Lean method for its suitability within the CMG Veggie Garden, and possible recommendation to home gardeners in Central Texas. This little book is a record of that. Please enjoy.



The Trellis

Shown here on July 22 is The Tomato Trellis with modifications made after the spring season and replanted with the Fall 2025 tomatoes. A family of Carolina Wrens was raised in that bird house during the spring season. Left; Version 1 Spring 2025. Right; Version 2 Fall 2025.



THE TOMATOES

The selection of tomatoes for spring was Costoluto Genovese.



“... twin flowers or fasciation of flowers. This happens when two flower buds develop within the same sepals, potentially leading to two conjoined tomatoes. “

The ribs of these tomatoes are so much like citrus segments. Damaged segments can be cut out & the rest saved, and there is virtually no core.

Also, they are *extremely* delicious.

The fall selections were Azoychka and Bigger Better Boy.



Spoiler alert the Fall Season weather did not cooperate. Highly variable temperatures, too hot & to cold. The irrigation system kept watering about right. Just before a large (first and really only) harvest, rain arrived somewhat unexpectedly and in over abundance. When harvested the tomatoes were split, and overly watery and not that excellent home-grown tomato prize that we waited six months for.



The reconstructed Trellis was a big improvement, it would have contributed to the success of the Spring crop making an already successful trial just a bit better. Maybe next Spring !

The Vagaries of Central Texas Weather



Lovely fall tomatoes swollen to the point of splitting open, just days before ripening, and only a few weeks from temperatures becoming too low.

*Now for the better part of the story; **Spring**.* First, a quick shout out to Rachel Walker, the leader of the Green House Crew. Rachel and her crew produce all of the starts for the CMG Veggie garden. She obtained the seeds and produced all of the tomato plant starts for this project. Her starts are always the best they could possibly be, and right on schedule, with back-ups available.



Costoluto Genovese

Quite possibly the best tomato, variety ever, anywhere.

Lower and Lean Tomato Growing



The plants keep growing but they do not look any taller ??
When first planted, above. Six weeks later, right.
12 Weeks later below.



So over the course of weeks the plants grew up toward the overhead spools. About every other week additional string was released from the spools, and the spools were moved to another support point on the rails above, to the right of where it was previously hanging. This way the “used” part of the stem was left to trail on the ground, and the plants moved around the center of the Trellis in a counterclockwise direction with the tops remaining within 3 - 5 feet of the ground. After 12 weeks the top of the plants had moved around to the opposite side of the Trellis.

The spring tomatoes grew from starts planted out in the first week of March, until the end of July. They produced the first fruits on May 5, and the last were harvested on July 20.

Remember that the starts were grown from seeds started by Rachel in the Green House, on January 6, 2025. So from starting seeds to last harvest was a total of 196 days.

Seeds to Starts	58 Days
Starts to First Fruit	61 Days
Starts to Last Fruit	138 Days
Seeds to Last Fruit	196 Days Total (more than 6 months !)

HARVEST





Except for a few tomatoes reserved for quality control review by Certified MGs, all tomatoes harvested were donated to Comal County Food Banks. Lessons were learned, fun was had and there were

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See more here:



Tomato Trellis Project – Serial Hobbyist
peasandtatoes.com

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A special thanks to all who contributed and to Emmy for her continuous curiosity, enthusiasm, and encouragement.