

Tomatoes-prune, stake or trellis?



down to earth
Marty Figley

You never know what can be learned when you begin to talk gardening to a friend or neighbor. Tomatoes are an example. A tip that should help considerably about watering has come from just such a conversation.

—A tin can — coffee or juice — that has holes punched in the sides and bottom and is placed in the ground alongside a tomato plant will ensure that the water supply is given at a steady rate and will seep around the roots for a gentle, deep watering.

Fill the can and let it drain, then fill it again and let the moisture soak the soil surrounding the plant. In this hot weather it should eliminate a few trips to the garden.

Water only when the plants need it. If they are wilted in the morning it is time for a good drink. If they look wilted on a hot day, that is normal.

BY NOW most of our tomato growers are "in business." The plants are already in the garden. Family and friends are eagerly ant-

icipating the harvest.

These heavy plants can be supported in three ways if space saving is necessary.

When staking, position the stake on the downwind side so that the plant will lean against the stake when the wind is blowing hard. This should be done when the plants are set, but careful insertion in the soil now won't do much harm to the roots.

The stakes should be four to eight feet high, and driven into the soil about a foot deep, three to five inches away from the plant. A strip of cloth or coated wire affixed tightly to the stake and loosely around the plant will keep all in order. As the plant grows taller, additional ties will be needed.

enough for a hand to reach in and harvest. A cage five feet high with a diameter of 12-30 inches, depending on the variety, will support a large, healthy plant. Make sure that the cage is secured firmly in the ground.

Trellising is an attractive way to support tomatoes. An earlier harvest is the rule. It takes more time to train the plants and fewer tomatoes will result because of necessary pruning.

A trellis system can be made of four-foot stakes placed some five feet apart, with three wires about a foot apart running horizontally between them. The branches of the plant need to be trained around and through the wires with some of the side shoots picked off so that the branches that are being trained will grow strong.

A SIMPLER but more costly manner of supporting tomatoes is a wire cage. These can be bought or made out of wire with holes large

EACH METHOD offers advantages and disadvantages. Choose the one that best meets your needs. Bush to-

matoes don't need support or trimming.

Many gardeners, with enough space, give their tomato plants free rein in the garden and usually harvest a bigger crop. A light mulch on the ground will help prevent rot, but may harbor insects. The plants will shade the ground and keep it moist so only a light mulch is necessary. If unsupported plants are pruned, air circulation is improved and may prevent disease problems.

Tomato plants are pruned by pinching off the shoots that grow from the stem in the crotch right above a leaf branch. It is beneficial to prune, stake or trellis tomatoes so that the energy of the plant is in one or two main stems.

Tomatoes are heavy feeders because they do so much work making those luscious fruits. Fertilize by

side-dressing (placing fertilizer around the plants) and work into the ground well, one or two times a season.

ONE MORE thought about pruning. If plants are pinched late in the season, more sunlight can reach the ripening fruits when the days are a little cooler.

Don't go overboard on the pruning, as tomatoes ripen better if they are shaded by some foliage. If they are exposed to too much sunlight, sun-scald can result. Toward the end of the season, the top of the plant can be pruned so that those fruits already on the vine can ripen from the energy saved with less plant growth.

Many varieties of tomatoes can be found, but it seems that the ones we pick from our gardens, no matter which kind, always taste the best.

Dancer given award

Heidi Ritchie, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Ritchie of Union Lake has been awarded a scholarship to the Festival of Dance/Summer School for the Performing Arts at Marygrove College this summer.

Heidi, 15, studied at Terry Newman's Dance Shop. At the school at Marygrove, she will be studying with master artists from the Alvin Alley

American Dance Theatre, the Australian Ballet Company, DancElliington, Starlight Express on Broadway and others.

Jürgen Schneider, ballet master of the American Ballet Theatre and personal coach of Mikhail Baryshnikov, will be teaching master classes and a methods seminar.

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