

Passing On Garden Wisdom: Tomato Staking Made Easy

Musings By Laura Miller | May 18, 2020 "Gardening Know How.com"

Being of Italian heritage, a garden wouldn't seem complete without rows of staked paste tomatoes. As the star ingredient in marinara, growing, and canning tomatoes for sauce is a long-standing family tradition. Yet, as we pass these traditions from one generation to the next, we sometimes learn tidbits of gardening wisdom which makes the job easier. This is the case with the time-consuming task of staking and tying tomatoes.

First, one must pull the multitude of tomato stakes out of storage, then hunt for a hammer for driving the stakes into the ground. Once the stakes are set, the garden scissors and twine must be coaxed from their hiding spots and used to painstakingly tie the stems to the stakes. This little activity can represent hours of time spent staking and tying tomato plants.

Tomato Staking Made Easy

There must be an easier way. And, thankfully, there is!

Years ago, I stumbled upon a gardening tip which makes staking large numbers of tomato plants much easier. I'm big on recycling, reusing, and repurposing. So, when I finished building a new fence for my horses, I realized I had bits and pieces of heavy-duty fencing material left over.

Most of this fencing material was too small to span the 12-foot (3.7 m.) gaps between fence posts. Others were sections of mangled fencing I had removed. (Thanks to an overambitious horse who believed the grass on the other side of the fence was greener.)

The following spring, I used the heavy-duty fence sections to stake my tomatoes in the garden. An 8-foot (2.4 m.) fence section only required 2 stakes, one at either end, for support. Yet, I could plant five tomato plants, spaced 24 inches (61 cm.) apart, along an 8-foot section. Five plants, two stakes. Math doesn't lie – this would save time.

What I later discovered was even more amazing. Instead of tying the tomato plants to the upright rods of the fence, I could weave the flexible growing tips in and out the spaces between the weave of the fence. I used livestock panels, but this method would work equally well with heavy-duty welded wire or chain-link fencing.

Only when I missed a few days did the tomato plants grow too much. Then, the stems became too rigid to bend. So, I would have to pull out the scissors and twine and go at it the old-fashioned way.

Now, if what goes up must come down, then what gets pounded into the garden must eventually be pulled out. The true blessing with this gardening trick came at the end of the growing season. I had far fewer tomato stakes to wiggle, pull or dig from the ground. This made cleaning off the garden in the fall much easier and faster.

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