

Simple Homemade Life

Episode 3: Easy Way To Trellis Tomatoes

Brian: Welcome to Simple Homemade Life.

Jami: Today, we're going to talk about how to grow your best tomatoes ever using cattle panels.

In The Garden

Brian: You just said people should use cattle panels with their tomatoes. I thought those cages were best.

Jami: Well, that's what you find most, and so you think that's what you should use, but we know that that doesn't work very well because they're a bit flimsy. When you plant the small, little tomato, it looks like it's great and it'll grow. What happens when it gets bigger?

Brian: Well, what will happen is, a number of things can happen. One of them is that the tomatoes grab a hold of the cage and they lift like Arnold Schwarzenegger, and they lift the cage up and pull it out as they're growing. So as they're getting big and they're getting lots of tomatoes, it gets really floppy.

Jami: Well, then, sometimes they just go over.

Brian: They do. I've had that. They go over. So I lash them together, like some kind of life raft.

Jami: Yeah. In our last garden, we did have some complicated things with T posts, and lots of strings and wired these together. Then I went to my Aunt Patti's garden, she's a master gardener, and she had the cattle panels with this really easy way to train them up it. I'm like, "That's what we're doing in our next garden, because it's really easy."

Jami: You want to keep your tomatoes off the ground for a number of reasons. Mainly, disease. If they're just sprawling, the leaves will get a lot of moisture that won't dry and they'll get blight and things like that, and they'll probably die quicker. Your fruit will also tend to rot and be misshapen. It'll be really hard to harvest, bending over harvesting every single plant.

Brian: Oh yeah. Where you can't even see the tomatoes that are ripe. I've been there, or you're digging your arm through the scratchy ... trying to find that last red tomato.

Jami: Yeah. So for the health of the plant and the ease of harvest, you've got to trellis them up.

Brian: Okay. Let's take a look at this. When we talk about cattle panels, which I had to learn what they were, they're this. It's a kind of really stiff fencing that is used, of

course, to keep in cattle. Now, something else I learned, I went to our tractor supply store to buy the panels, and I go, "Well, I want eight foot cattle panels," because that's what you want. That's the easiest for our 12 foot beds, because notice they overlap a little bit, and they're very thick, and you probably can't cut them unless you have some kind of special hacksaw. Well, anyway, they told me, "Well, an eight footer, that's just like a utility panel, or that's a handy panel. That's not a real cattle panel. They have to be 16 feet long to be a real cattle panel."

Brian: It's like, come on. Anyway, get a cattle panel in the length of your bed or they can overlap like we've done here. Then they attached to a post. Again, there's two kinds of posts. I didn't know this. You look at them from the top, and if you look at the top of this post, it's shaped like a T. T posts are really thick, and sturdy, and heavy. They're the ones that are used for fencing, like barbed wire fencing. There are also U posts and we've gotten those before. They're more for gardening. They're a lot lighter. If you look at them from the top, they're just shaped like a U. Actually, either one will work. It's just to get the ones that are long enough, that are six feet long, that will hold this sturdy, we needed to get T posts. That's what we had.

Brian: They're not very much, they're like four or five bucks a piece. They're pretty inexpensive. Finally, to hold the cattle panels onto the T post and to hold them together, we just use white zip ties. Zip ties, next to duct tape, you can just hold anything together. You just get them in place. It takes two people holding them together, and then just zip tie them, and it holds them to the T post and holds them together, and you're sturdy and ready to grow some tomatoes.

Jami: I did want to mention that when we put these up last year, we just used white zip ties that we found. We've since learned that it's better to get the black zip ties for outdoor applications because they last longer. The sun doesn't break them down as fast. So you want black zip ties to attach your cattle panels to the posts.

Jami: Cattle panels. I mentioned in our last video, that I had never seen them being used before. Then since then, just in the few weeks since that video, I've seen a number of other gardens use cattle panels for growing up tomatoes and things. So it's not unique, but it was unique to me - I hadn't heard about it.

Jami: But I think one of the things that is unique is the easy way that you trellis them up that I learned from my aunt. The secret to that is bungee cords, just regular bungee cords that you find at a hardware store, but you do want different sizes. We start with the really small ones when the plant is little, and then you have different sizes that you can use as the plant grows. I'll just show you how easy it is to use this. You can see that I've already got one, they're small like this, you just use the little one and it doesn't have to be tight. It's just enough to keep them up. I have a little stake too that I use when they're just planted. I'll remove that later.

Jami: I have a whole post about how to plant tomatoes, a whole video on the blog about how to plant tomatoes so that they thrive. I explain how I did it and why I use this red mulch. So definitely watch that to see. That's why you see the row cover on this bed. We took it off for the video, but for the first month that we grow tomatoes in Oregon, where it's a little bit cooler sometimes, I protect them with the row cover. That's why these are looking ... they weren't so healthy when I planted them out, you'll see in the planting video. Now they look great just a few weeks later because they were under the row cover.

Jami: As the plant grows up and you see that it needs it, you just simply come out and you put another layer, and you just put another layer of bungee on and that holds them. Then when they grow really big, you just get even a bigger one and you

put it on there. If one comes out here, you just come out one day, put it the branch back in and put the bungee back on.

Jami: It is so easy. It was wonderful. I've done it now two years in a row. It is just the most wonderful way to grow tomatoes I've ever had. It's easy. I don't have to worry about pruning, or staking, or the things falling over. So bungee cords and cattle panels, that's the secret.

Jami: One of the things that makes the cattle panel idea work so well are long narrow beds instead of wide beds. You tend to do wide beds and then you plant a couple rows of the tomatoes, but then you can't reach the center of the tomatoes. By doing long narrow beds, these are 12 foot long by two feet wide, it just holds the row of tomatoes and you can reach them from either side easily. We did a plan of four long narrow beds for this garden that we added the cattle panels, and they're permanent, in these beds. Then we alternate. Last year, these that are planted with tomatoes, grew beans, and now the beans are over there. We're able to rotate a little bit, not optimal, but at least it gets them not planted in the same bed every year, which is an organic way to grow things.

In The Kitchen

Brian: Okay. One of the best reasons for growing tomatoes is to eat them fresh, but there is another really, really good way to have them.

Jami: Exactly. Tomatoes are great for preserving and eating later. I can a lot of tomatoes and preserve a lot of tomatoes, but there are three recipes that are tops. Like, I have to do those first to make sure we have enough to get us through the year.

Jami: One of them is **salsa**, and it's a canned salsa that stays in your cupboard, but it's thick, which is unusual for some canned salsas if you have ever had them. You can make it spicy or not, and it is good on, well, everything you use salsa for. It is so wonderful to have this in your cupboard. You don't have to buy it from the store and you know exactly what's in it.

Jami: Another thing that I discovered when I had a huge amount of tomatoes and I wanted something other than salsa and marinara, I discovered tomato chutney, and I made this recipe and adapted it. I had never had chutney before. It was so good, I had to call it **Addictive Tomato Chutney**. If you don't know what you'd put it on, I'll just tell you, everything you'd put ketchup on. You use this, I call it adult ketchup. It is so good. Everybody I serve it to wants the recipe, because it really is addictive. So, make sure you grow enough tomatoes to make addictive tomato chutney.

Jami: If you're thinking, "Well, I don't really want to can, I'm not sure I'm into canning," then I have a recipe for you. As you can tell, I pulled this out of the freezer, it's from last year, and I make sure we have enough of this to last us too, because I don't have to go buy store bought roasted tomato sauce, or marinara sauce, or whatever you call it. This is a **roasted tomato sauce**. It is so easy. You can use any kind of tomato you have in the garden. You put it in a pan with some vegetables and you let it cook. Then you whir it up and put it in a container in the freezer, and you've got the most delicious tomato sauce ever.

Brian: So get your cattle panel going with tomatoes, and then be sure you're subscribed to our channel so you don't miss our next episode where we show you what we've learned about reclaiming old wood. Splinter city.

Jami: Oh, I thought it was working.

Brian: Oh, it's fine. It's great. Thanks again for watching. We will see you next time.

Jami: Goodbye.