

Why train and prune greenhouse tomatoes?

Removing excess shoots, leaves, flowers, and fruits maximizes ease of harvest and fruit quality. **Note:** this system is for indeterminate, non-“bush” type tomato varieties.

Training

Stretch a strong wire cable over each row of tomatoes at a height of about 2.5 meters. Hang enough string (polypropylene or hemp, 6 ply) above each plant to reach the base of the stem and tie or clip the string to the main stem (Fig. 1). As the tomato plant grows, wrap or clip the string around the plant. Lean and drop each tomato plant in one direction when it reaches the cable by releasing some string from the wire (Fig. 2).

Pruning

- **Side shoots:** Prune tomato plants to a single stem by pinching off any side shoots (Fig. 3). Do not use a knife. Do this at least once per week; remove side shoots when they are very small. Do not remove side shoots above the newest flower cluster.
- **Leaves:** Remove the two to three leaves under fruit clusters that begin to yellow and wilt and the fruit matures. Make sure the fruit is at the mature green stage (Fig. 4) before removing leaves.
- **Flowers and Fruits (optional):** Prune flower clusters and fruits to help achieve larger tomatoes. Prune remaining flowers in clusters once there are three to four well-formed fruit on that cluster. Remove any abnormal flowers and deformed fruits to reduce competition between growing fruit.
- **Growing points (optional):** For fall crops, remove the growing point of the main stem about 45 days before harvesting the last fruits. Leave two to three leaves above the top cluster to shade and feed the top fruits. For summer crops, do not remove the growing point of the main stem. Instead stop pollination or remove flower clusters about 45 days before harvesting the last fruits.



Figure 1. Mature green stage (Jerry Parsons)

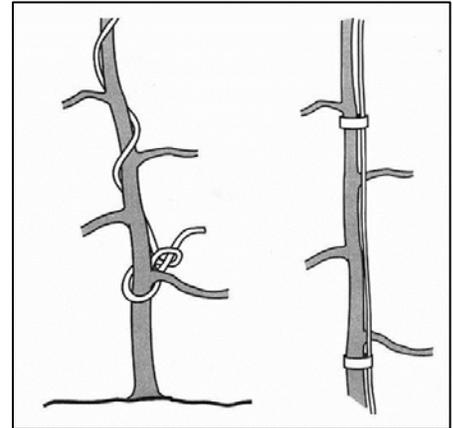


Figure 1. Securing string to tomato stem (Gary Hickman)

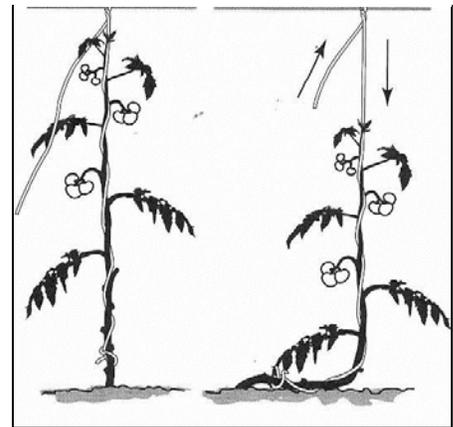


Figure 2. Tomato plant at left will be lowered to position on right by releasing some string from support wire (Gary Hickman)



Figure 2. Pinching off side shoots (Gary Hickman)