



## Useful (But Ugly?) Trellises

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Photos by Rick Gush

Trellises are almost essential in Italy where a small farmer can expect to have less land. I use the river bamboo canes to build several trellises in the garden every year, but I'll admit that I'm not crazy for how the trellises look when I first build them.

In early spring the bare sticks and crooked construction makes the garden look like some of the haphazard shacks that the gypsies erect around the edges of the big cities here. One would almost expect laundry to be hanging somewhere.

Without the trellises the garden looks a bit more sophisticated and less rustic, but the trellises are just so useful.

Actually, they're almost essential for the situation here. I have about 300 square feet of cultivatable surface in my garden, which is composed of more than a dozen little terraced planting areas all stacked one on top of the other running up the cliff.

I always wish I had more space. Things like squash and pumpkins and beans and cucumbers and melons all take a lot of surface area for the vines to spread out.

So, there's three reasons I use the bamboo trellises: To multiply the amount of crops that can grow in a given bed

To allow some vegetables to hang their fruits, and lastly

To expand the quantity of sunny surface area that can be covered by the crops

A "tepee"-like trellis will house bean vines. In one bed that is less than twenty square feet, I want to grow six tomatoes, but I think the soil volume would also support grow a row of cucumbers.

The tomatoes will take up most of the surface area, so I built an almost horizontal trellis coming out from the downhill edge, with the intention of planting the cucumbers at the edge of the bed and letting their vines grow out over the trellis, thereby not competing with the tomatoes for bed space.

When walking on the terrace below, the trellis where the cucumbers will grow is above head level and at a very comfortable picking height.

In the bed below, I built a wacky trellis that first goes up, then over, then back down, making a covered walkway over the pathway that leads to the terrace below.

This structure will be used to grow the hanging trombetti type zucchini.

I like to put these vines up on something in such a way as that their long fruits can hang freely, because hanging trombetti are much straighter and therefore more desirable than those grown along the ground.

My third notable trellis is the sort of long tepee that will house the bean vines.

This bed has only 70 square feet, and although it is my largest single bed, 70 square feet is not really much space.



The sides of the trellis tepee are much taller than the bed is wide, and as a result, the tepee has about 170 square of surface area exposed to the sun, which more than doubles the effective growing surface of the bed.

The good news for the future is that a few months from now, when the plants have covered the trellises, what was once unsightly will turn into a wonderland of inviting bowers. Walking underneath and harvesting fruit will be big fun.

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