Growing Tomatoes Using The Horizontal Trellis Method
By John Ditchburn (Ditchy), Urban Food Garden http://www.urbanfoodgarden.org/

Horizontal trellises can be made using a timber frame and light weight fencing mesh but I made mine out of heavy duty reinforced concrete mesh as it does not need extra support. This is how to make two 3 by 1.2 metre horizontal trellises out of a standard sheet of reinforced concrete mesh.

Building a horizontal trellis
Horizontal trellises can be made using a timber frame and light weight fencing mesh but I made mine out of heavy duty reinforced concrete mesh as it does not need extra support. This is how to make two 3 by 1.2 metre horizontal trellises out of a standard sheet of reinforced concrete mesh.

Most methods of growing tomatoes involve extensive tying and pruning of laterals (the side shoots). While some gardeners handle this well others find that at some stage in the season the laterals get away from them. Growing tomatoes using the horizontal trellis method greatly reduces the amount of pruning and tying you have to do while at the same time keeping the tomato laterals off the ground. It also allows a good airflow under the tomato plants which reduces the risk of mold and aids in the ripening of the fruit.

1. Buy a sheet of reinforced concrete mesh 6.0M X 2.4M with a mesh Size of 200MM X 200MM and a wire thickness of 6MM. Cut into two three metre lengths.

2. Take one of the lengths and cut 400mm (two 200mm mesh squares) off each side so that one row of squares is intact but the second row is cut so as to create a series of spikes. These will form the vertical sides that will support the horizontal trellis.

3. Cut more squares off one side to produce a width that you can comfortably reach to the centre with your hands, which will be somewhere between one and one and a half metres.

4. Repeat the process with the other three metre length to make a second horizontal trellis. Though if you only want one trellis the remaining mesh can be used as a vertical frame to grow climbing beans up.
5. Take the two side sections and drive their spikes ten centimetres into the ground so that they stand upright with the tops being 30 centimetres above the ground. These uprights should be parallel with each other with a gap of around a metre.

6. Place the main section of mesh on top of the two uprights. You can tie them together at a couple of places but I have found that 6 mm mesh is heavy enough to sit in place without ties.

**Planting out the horizontal trellis**

Plant six tomato plants in two rows under the trellis and stake and tie each tomato plant for support.

Remove all laterals from the plants until the main stem grows above the trellis. You can now remove the stakes as they are no longer needed.

All you have to do from here on in is redirect any laterals that grow over the edge of the trellis back towards the centre. Leave the laterals lying on top of the frame to grow naturally. The trellis will keep the laterals from touching the ground and allow a reasonable airflow under the tomatoes.

Growing tomatoes using the horizontal trellis method has its drawbacks. Fewer tomatoes are produced per square metre of garden bed than staked tomato plants, and the extra laterals create a little too much shade.

But if you really have a problem keeping up with pruning and tying tomato laterals then this method might be for you.