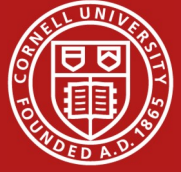


Trellising Seed Crops

By Natasha Field



Trellising is a tool that is incredibly useful for seed crops for various reasons. You may be familiar with it for crops like tomatoes and cucumbers but it has a wider use in seed production.

Starting with crops like tomatoes and cucumbers, the advantages are similar to those for vegetable production – disease reduction, ease of harvest and increased yield per square foot. Keeping the plants up off the ground allows for better airflow and application of fungicides if needed, and reduces crop loss since animals and bugs have a more difficult time reaching the fruit. Trellising allows for the plants to grow upright, which allows for workers to crouch or stand while harvesting and reduces strain on their backs. And keeping the plants trellised keeps them upright and you can increase yield per acre by either putting plants closer together or just keeping fruit off the ground.

In variety trials we conducted at CCE ENYCHP, we found trellising bush peas allowed for faster and easier harvest of peas as vegetables especially when we were growing them in a high tunnel for early season production. But the same principle would apply for seed production. Keeping the peas trellised allows for longer harvest periods as the peas mature and you can harvest pea pods as they dry. Sometimes the peas will continue producing flowers and pods if you are able to harvest the dry pods frequently. We used both a plastic mesh vertically and a Florida weave with twine and both were effective at keeping the plants upright.



Photos: Bush peas growing on a vertical plastic mesh. Sugar Snap and bush peas in a Florida weave trellis

Some folks trellis large lettuces because how tall they get and they may have shallow root systems. We found that our small lettuce plants didn't need trellising but they were also protected from strong winds by high tunnels and other crops.

For other crops, trellising is helpful or even necessary to keep tall seed heads upright. This is especially important for biennial crops that may have small roots compared to the height and weight of the branches and seed it produces.

Radishes and beets are an example of this. They produce seed heads that are three to five feet tall and if the roots are small, the seed heads may break off at the attachment point to the roots because of the weight. Plants may fall over especially with small round radish roots.

Beets fare better because the plant stems are woodier and the roots reach deeper but there was a tendency for the lower stalks to flop onto the ground.



Photo: beet plants

For onions, the root system is very small and the stems are hollow but thick, so there is a tendency for the plants to fall over or for the stalks to bend. Using a horizontal trellis near the top of the seed stalk helps keep them upright and from collapsing under the weight of the seed heads once they form seed.

Mesh trellis placed horizontally close to the top of the seed stalks (ours was around 30-40 inches) works very well for these crops as well as flower crops grown for seed.



Photos: a bed of onions with the mesh trellis placed horizontally

Some ways to figure out what kind of trellis to use are: to grow a few sample plants a year ahead and see what the crop looks like, search for photos online or in books for pictures of the plants in flower and seed, or talk to other growers who produce seed about their experience.



This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under sub-award number LNE22-446. Learn more about [Northeast SARE](#)