



Tomato cages sold for home gardeners are often too wimpy for Kansas conditions. Fortunately, you can make your own cages from concrete reinforcing mesh (wire). This material is normally 5' high with the "mesh" forming 6" squares. The shortest rolls are usually 50' long, but some lumber yards will cut off just the amount you need. Cages can be made in different sizes but I like a 2 foot diameter cage so I can space my tomatoes at 2 feet and then use a T-post to in between each pair to stabilize them in the wind. Figure 6.5 feet of mesh to complete one cage that is 2 feet in diameter. You will need to cut the mesh in order to make the cages. Small bolt cutters work well for this. Be careful when cutting as the mesh comes in rolls that will spring back into a cylinder as the last cut is made.

Count off 13 squares but cut each horizontal wire at the end of the 13 square. This will leave a series of 12 complete squares horizontally with prongs left on the 13th square. Use these prongs to make a cylinder by bending the prongs over the vertical wire on the first square. Tomatoes with large, rangy vines need all five feet of the mesh, but those with shorter, semi-determinate vines can get by with a shorter cage.

Also, cut off the bottom horizontal wire to leave prongs that can be pushed into the ground to help with stability. As mentioned above, a T-post will likely need to be driven near the cage. Tying the cage to the T-post can help prevent the cage from toppling in windy conditions.

These cages will last for years, but do take up a great deal of storage space when not in use. If you don't have room for storage, there are heavy-duty tomato cages that will either fold flat or disassemble to make storage easier such as Texas Tomato Cages, Titan Tomato Cages and various others. Regardless, they may need to be staked if your garden is in a windy location. (Ward Upham)

If you have questions please contact Ray Ladd, Atchison County Extension Agent,
at 913-833-5450 or atchisonco@ksu.edu