

✧ Renee's Garden ✧

Set The Table From Your Garden

Protecting Your Young Seedlings with Bird Netting

Growing from seed is exciting and rewarding, but care must be taken to protect young seedlings while they are small and vulnerable. It can be extremely frustrating to watch your seeds germinate and begin to grow, only to have birds come along when you are not looking and pluck them out of the ground one by one. In our trial garden we are big fans of bird netting and use it extensively as a simple and effective way to protect seedlings from bird predation. Trial Garden Manager Lindsay Del Carlo shows you how to do it.

Our trial garden consists of raised beds that are 4 feet wide and anywhere from 16 to 60 feet long. We use $\frac{3}{4}$ inch black irrigation tubing made of soft polyethylene, commonly called “poly tubing”, cut to 6 foot long pieces to make structures to support the bird netting. Depending on the width of your bed, the tubing pieces should be at least 2 feet longer than the bed is wide so that the structure makes a tall arch over the top of the bed, but not be so long that they collapse in the middle. If you have a bed that is very wide, you may have to make several narrow sections of bird netting structures to cover the entire bed.



Poly Tubing cut to 6 ft. lengths

Bird netting itself comes in different sizes and can be easily cut with scissors to whatever size you need. We recommend netting that is $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{5}{8}$ inch gauge which will exclude the smallest birds without danger to them. For a 4 ft. wide bed, we cut the netting to a width of about 7 feet, and leave it at full length. If it is too long for your bed, it can be simply rolled up at the ends and held down with landscape staples or rocks; it is better to run a little long than too short. Extra length at the sides will be gathered and held down with landscape staples.



Bird-X Bird Netting: An example of one brand of commercially available bird netting. Bird netting comes in various lengths and can be cut with scissors to the size you need. It is generally available at any good garden center or nursery. Online and mail-order sources include: Peaceful Valley Farm Supply, Harmony Farm Supply or Gardeners Supply Company.

At each end of the bed, we crisscross 2 pieces of tubing to make a sturdy frame. The ends of the tubing are simply stuck into the soil about 4 inches deep. Place single sections of tubing about 3-4 feet apart in the rest of the bed, close enough together so that the bird netting will not bow in the middle. Clever birds here have been known to perch on top of the netting and pluck the seedlings out if it is not taunt enough.



The ends of the bird netting structure are crisscrossed poly tubing.



Place single sections of tubing 3-4 feet apart.

After all of the tubing is in place, drape the bird netting over the top of the tubing and secure it on one end with landscape staples or rocks. You can also secure the netting to the top of the tubing with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch x 4 inch long “Snap Clamps” for extra stability. “Snap Clamps” are also used to join pieces of netting together on very long beds.



Landscape Staples 4-6 inches long.
Garden, hardware and building supply stores carry these inexpensive long staples to push into the ground and hold the netting taunt and flush to the ground.



“Snap Clamps” are used to secure bird netting +to the poly tubing and to join 2 pieces of netting together. They can be found at snapclamps.com or at charleysgreenhouse.com

Pull the netting tight to the other end of the bed and secure the ends with 4-6 inch long landscape staples. Use more landscape staples to secure the netting along the sides to the ground every 8-10 inches, close enough so that birds cannot slip under the netting.



Stretch the netting from the secured end to the other end.



Secure bird netting along the sides with landscape staples every 8-10 inches.

The bird netting should stay in place until the seedlings are large enough to withstand damage from birds - they seem to lose interest in seedlings once they start to mature and are at least 6-8 inches tall. If you are at all concerned, there is nothing wrong with leaving the bird netting on until your young plants are fully grown and ready to eat as long as they have enough space. (Of course, you will have to open the netting once or twice to thin plants out to proper spacing, so they have enough room to mature and size up.)

The same irrigation tubing structure can also be used for supporting other kinds protective materials like shade cloth in very hot areas and row covers at the end of the season for frost protection.



A finished bird netting structure.



Young seedlings growing under bird netting.