A simple trellis serves as an ideal support for climbing plants. Because foliage and blooms are the centerpiece, your structure should act as a skeleton, providing the framework to encourage interesting, vertical growth. Trellises add a cottage feel to a landscape design, and they can be used as dividers to create “rooms” in a garden. Or, placed against a home or wall, trellises serve as leaning ladders on which ivy can climb.

This is an excellent beginner construction project because the parts are simple to cut and construct. We’ll provide a plan for a trellis here, but you can adapt it by playing with various arrangements for the trim.

The Dirt
A trellis is an aesthetic feature, but it must be functional. It should accommodate the space where you want to place it and the plants it will support. So think first, where will you place the trellis? What is the growing habit of the vines that will climb the structure? Fast growers may need a taller trellis. Also keep in mind surrounding elements: fences, gates, trees, tall shrubs, and walls. Your trellis should be of similar proportion. Think how ridiculous a 5-foot (1.5 m) trellis would look up against a 9-foot (2.7 m) fence!

Next, consider design elements. Vertical legs help your trellis stand, and you should incorporate an odd number of legs for interest. (We use five legs in this project.) This odd rule is a principle in flower arranging, as well. One is dramatic, two looks weak. Three is interesting, four is just missing something. The fifth, and so on. Think odd numbers, and stagger the heights of vertical legs. Make every other one 3 inches (7.6 cm) taller or more for a rustic effect.
Finally, you can experiment with motif as you arrange the trellis trim in patterns, such as diamonds. You can mimic existing themes in your garden. And don’t forget the paint! Blend trellises with the background with earthy browns or greens, or choose a contrast color to add drama. White is conservative and clean, but a series of trellises in bright colors is fun and whimsical.

**Preliminaries**

Before you begin, sketch your trellis to scale. Each vertical leg for this project is ¾ inch (1.9 cm) wide. You should place vertical legs 4 to 8 inches (10.2 to 20.3 cm) apart. (We allowed 6 inches [15.2 cm]) You can follow our plan, or measure your space and use this guide to create your own recipe. Also, you will attach at least three horizontal supports across the legs: one at the bottom, another two-thirds from the bottom, and a third about 2 inches (5.1 cm) from the top of the trellis. You can add more horizontal supports if necessary.

**Design:** To experiment with design, draw a full-size pattern of your trellis on kraft paper, which is large enough to accommodate a life-sized sketch. Cut ¾-inch (1.9-cm) strips of paper that will serve as experimental trim. Now, play with various designs by rearranging the strips on the drawing of your trellis base (Figure 1).

**Cutting:** Use these strips as a pattern for cutting trim pieces from screen moldings. Tape the pattern to the wood and make the cuts. A back saw and miter box will make it easier to make clean angled cuts. Cut the remaining pieces to size based on your design. Use the parting stop for the vertical legs. Cut the lath equal to the finished width of the trellis for the horizontal supports. Cut another set of horizontal supports from the lath that are 2 inches (5.1 cm) longer.

**Supplies**

- Drill
- Saw
- Wire cutters
- ½" x ¾" (1.3 x 1.9 cm) pine parting stop
- ¼" x ½" (0.7 x 3.4 cm) pine lath
- ¼" x ¾" (0.7 x 1.9 cm) pine or oak screen moldings
- Exterior wood glue
- ½" (13 mm) wire brads
- Exterior primer and paint
- #3 rebar for mounting

**Steps**

1. **Place vertical legs** flat on the ground 6" (15.2 cm) apart. Glue and nail the shorter horizontal supports to the legs. Secure the supports with two brads at each joint. Flip over the trellis. Following the same technique, secure the longer pieces of horizontal lath by lining them up against the horizontal supports. This lath extends 1" (2.5 cm) beyond the trellis on either side.

2. **Place the screen molding** onto the trellis based on your design. Apply glue to joints. Drill pilot holes, and drive brads into place where molding intersects legs. Place a scrap of lath under the trellis for support.
3. **Paint** as desired (Figure 2).

4. You can use a **surface** or freestanding mount to secure your trellis in the desired location.

   **Surface mount:** Stack and glue three 6” (15.2 cm) pieces of lath together. After the glue dries, cut the stack into four 1¼” (3.5 cm) squares. Drill pilot holes through the outer top leg and horizontal support joints. Place a square between the trellis and the wall or fence and drive a galvanized deck screw through the joint, the square, and into the wall. Repeat for the other upper corner, then for the lower outer corners.

   **Freestanding mount:** Drive two pieces of #3 rebar into the ground at each end of trellis. Using plastic-coated wire, secure trellis to the stakes at several points on each side, working your way up to the top. Be sure the stakes are buried at least 12” (30.5 cm) into the ground and extend above ground at least half the height of the trellis.

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**PROJECT PAIRINGS**

TRY THESE complementary projects:

- **Vines for Landscapes**
  Learn to cultivate climbers for your trellis.

- **Build an Arbor**
  Ideal for cottage gardens, trellises are perfect accompaniments for these garden structures.

- **Perfect Pergola**
  A natural partner for a trellis.