

Growing Tips 2a

PLANTING GRAFTED TOMATOES



Plant tomatoes and - presto! – a garden. Whether in a pot, patch, or plot – tomatoes capture the essence of summer. Follow a few simple steps for a bountiful crop.

What are grafted tomatoes?

Grafting is a technique that involves splicing the top part of one variety onto the bottom part of a different variety.

There are two parts to a grafted plant; the **rootstock**, which contains the root of the plant; and the **scion** which is the fruiting part of the plant on top.

Why use grafted plants?

The rootstock is chosen for its disease-resistance, vigorous growth, and high fruit yield. The scion is selected for the taste of the fruit.

Many **heirloom** varieties that have large, tasty fruits, but may lack disease-resistance are now being grown on grafted rootstock.

Choose plants with straight, sturdy stems about the thickness of a pencil. Look for the grafting scar located on the stem **above** the soil in the pot.

Sun and Soil

Choose a **sunny, warm location** and plant **after the last spring frost** in your area when temperatures *average* at least 55 - 60°F.

Tomatoes thrive in any well-drained soil with moderate fertility, and a pH of 6 -7.

Prepare the soil.

For an excellent start, **test your soil** and amend as necessary. Use a general-purpose fertilizer or choose organic amendments such as blood, bone, fish or feather meal. → See **Growing Tips 18** Planting a Vegetable Garden

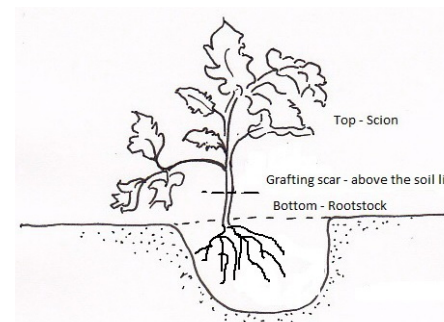
Add organic matter, such as compost, aged manure, leaf mold or coffee grounds.

Stake, cage or mulch?

- **Decide whether you will stake, cage** or allow plants to run on **mulch**. Staked tomatoes produce cleaner fruit that ripens earlier, but must be pruned, and tied to the stake. Caged or mulched plants don't need pruning.
- **Set wooden stakes 4' – 5' tall, before you plant** to avoid injuring the young seedlings.
- **Install cages right after planting** – most tomatoes require large, 24" diameter cages, 4' – 5' high; center carefully over the plants.
- **Plant transplants** in rows 3' apart with 18" between plants in the row if you stake or cage. If you will **mulch**, space rows 4' – 5' apart, with 3' between plants.

How to Plant Grafted Tomatoes

1. **Water the plants thoroughly**, preferably with a solution of soluble fertilizer and water, about 1/2 hour before you plant.
2. **Mark** where you will plant and dig a hole a few inches bigger than the root ball of the plant. Tear the rim off peat pots so that it won't wick moisture away from the roots.



3. **IMPORTANT! Plant the root ball level with the planting hole so that the grafting scar is well above the soil line.** If the scion comes in contact with the soil, it will root, taking away the benefits of the rootstock.
4. **Cover the root ball with soil.** Press down gently to eliminate air pockets.
5. **Water the new transplants immediately with 2 quarts water.** Allow the water to soak down to the roots.
6. **Snip off** any new growth (suckers) that grows on the stem of the rootstock.