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 gifted 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.

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