

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

How to top graft tomatoes:

Grafting is a technique often used with trees, such as apple trees, to join two parts of a plant together by tissue regeneration. However, it can also be used in other plants, such as tomatoes. Grafting is done on tomatoes in order to provide more disease-resistant varieties, and it can also reduce the need to use pesticides. The process of top grafting tomatoes can take from 6-8 weeks.

Pick the right rootstock to use, and sow your seeds indoors 6 to 8 weeks before the transplant date. Once the seeds have germinated, wait 10 days and then reduce the temperature to 64 to 66 degrees to encourage the plants to grow stocky. Overplant your seeds by at least 25 percent.

The seedlings should be ready for grafting about 17 to 21 days after you sow the seeds. Use a grafting clip to decide if the plants are ready or not, and when you put the grafting clip on the stem of the seedling, the seedling is ready when the clip fits snugly. Prepare a clean area indoors and do not graft near a fan or a vent. Graft with new blades and clips, and don't smoke while grafting or you may pass on the Tobacco Mosaic Virus to your plants. Make sure you have a healing chamber to store your plants in following the graft. A healing chamber will keep the plants in a high-humidity, low-light controlled environment as they heal.

Water your plants normally the day before grafting, but don't water the day of the procedure.

To graft, take a double-edged razor blade and snap it in half lengthwise while it is still in its cover. Take your rootstock plant with a stem thickness that matches the grafting clips, and cut at a 45-degree angle below the



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cotyledons. Find your scion and cut at the same angle and discard the root ball. Sometimes, people will defoliate the leaves of the scion except for the leaf at the growing point. Place a grafting clip halfway over one of the cut stems and join the two together. Make sure there is no dirt or air between the cut surfaces because then the plant won't heal. Return the seedling to its flat. Move the plants to the healing chamber and keep the chamber closed for three days. Keep it in the dark for 24 hours and then use soft light.

On the fourth day, check to see if the plants are still moist and then close the tunnel. Make a small opening in the chamber on the fifth day so some of the humidity can escape, and then gradually bring the grafted tomatoes into a greenhouse. The silicone grafting clips will expand as the plant grows and then fall off by themselves.



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