



Grafted Tomatoes

In the summer of 2013, Harris Seeds gave me sample grafted tomatoes to test in my Church Food Pantry Garden. I found the grafted tomatoes grew larger, faster, flowered earlier and produced more fruit than the non-grafted tomatoes of the same variety that were planted a few feet away. The pair of pictures shown here are of the Brandywine Pink variety. The pictures were taken on July 17th, 2013. I tried making the signs the same size in the view, so you can compare the plant size to a known sized object.



Q: I have seen grafted tomatoes listed in a couple of vegetable catalogs. The catalogs say they produce better, but of course they say that. They are much more expensive than non-grafted tomatoes. I am wondering if it is worth trying.

A: One of the benefits of writing articles about gardening is that sometimes I get samples. Last summer I was fortunate to have grafted tomato samples from Harris Seeds. I can tell you that the side by side comparison of the same varieties in grafted and non-grafted was amazing. The grafted tomatoes grew bigger, faster and had far more tomatoes than the non-grafted plants.

I had samples of Brandywine, Cherokee Purple and San Marzano. Several times, I harvested more than 50 of the large Roma style San Marzano tomatoes off the same plant. Neither of the Cherokee Purple tomatoes did great, but the grafted one was definitely better. The grafted Brandywine gave about twice as many tomatoes as the non-grafted one. If you can't find grafted tomatoes at your local garden center, Harris Seeds has these three tomatoes as a sample pack of two of each on their web site at www.harrisseed.com.

Grafted tomato plants are grafted in an effort to get around a deficiency in the upper half of the plant. Many tomato varieties don't produce large root systems or are not resistant to soil borne disease organisms. By grafting a good tomato on to a strong rooting tomato or a disease resistant tomato that doesn't produce many fruit, you get the best of both varieties.

You do have to be careful to not bury the trunk of the grafted tomato plant. When we plant a non-grafted tomato we often bury the trunk section because it will send out more roots. We did this because many tomatoes weren't good at rooting and because tomato plants with more roots get more water and grow more fruit. The graft on the tomato is only a couple of inches above the soil, so make sure it stays above the ground.

Another company that is selling grafted vegetables and who won a Green Thumb Award in 2011 for grafted tomatoes is the Territorial Seed Company. They have grafted basil, cucumber, eggplant, pepper, tomato and watermelon plants. They even have some tomatoes that produce two different kinds of fruit on the same plant.

If your local garden center doesn't stock them, try www.territorialseed.com to find them. Both of the companies mentioned in this article sell to retail stores, but if you can't find the plants check their web sites. They both have many organic, and heirloom vegetable seeds and plants.