

## **GRAFTING TOMATOES USING ROOTSTOCK** Cultural Details:ZZ640

### **Introduction**

Grafting tomatoes onto a rootstock gives the grafted plant increased pest and disease resistance, and improves the overall vigour of the plant. Grafting of tomatoes is a practice which has been used for some time, but on a limited scale. However, with the increasing concern over chemical treatments, grafting is regaining favour, allowing standard varieties to be grown in unsterilised soil.

### **Step by step guide**

Materials: a clean sharp craft knife and a reel of clear tape approximately 2-3cm wide.

- 1). Sow rootstock seeds approximately 4 days prior to sowing the tomato seed. The rootstock is slower to germinate and will need to be a similar size to the tomato plant to enable a good graft.
- 2). Prick out the seedlings when they are large enough to handle, placing one tomato plant and one rootstock plant side by side in the centre of a 9cm pot. The rootstock sometimes has a different leaf type to normal tomatoes for identification purposes because it is important to know which is which when grafting, therefore keep them separate and well labelled.
- 3). When the plants reach approximately 10-15cm high they are ready to graft. Ensure the compost is kept moist to aid the grafting process.
- 4). Remove the seed leaves (cotyledons) from both the rootstock and the tomato plants (wilting will occur quickly so speed is important).
- 5). Remove the top leaves of the rootstock (this can be left until after grafting to reduce wilting). Make a downward cut at an angle of 45° halfway into the rootstock about 1-1.5cm deep. Make a corresponding cut upwards in the tomato plant at the same height. Fit the two cuts together and fix with a 2-3cm wide strip of clear sticky tape, making sure the tape covers the cut, or alternatively use a tomato grafting clip.
- 6). Grow on with high humidity, which can be achieved by the use of a polythene tent suspended free from the plants. Inspect regularly and remove the polythene as soon as the graft has healed over (normally within a few days).
- 7). Leave the original tomato root and the grafted rootstock in the compost and plant out as normal.