

Monday, June 7, 2010

Grafting Vegetables to Increase Yields & Reduce Disease!

Grafting is a technique that has been used for many years as a way of improving production in perennial plants, like nut and fruit trees. When plants are young, two varieties are joined by cutting each plant and binding them together. This surgical connection, or grafting, has allowed us to improve production in crops like citrus, apples, peaches, pecans and much more. The rootstock (bottom plant) is usually resistant to disease or insects and the scion (top portion) produces a desirable quality fruit or nut. Recently, grafting of vegetables is a technique being used, especially in the orient, to improve fruit yield, drought tolerance, and to protect plants against soil borne diseases and pests, such as root nematodes.

This technique is under study at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center, part of Texas A & M University, in Weslaco. Dr. John Jifon, an Associate Professor of Plant Physiology, studies ways that plants experience stress and looks for ways to relieve stress pressures. In a recent interview, Dr. Jifon noted that "grafting in vegetables has been slow to catch on in the United States, because our grafting is still done by hand and in other countries, mechanical methods are being used. Still, in high dollar crops, such as watermelon, improved yield and reduced disease pressure makes the process worth while."

On Tuesday, June 8, 2010, Dr. John Jifon, will provide a talk entitled, "Grafting Technology as an Alternative for Methyl Bromide in Vegetable Production." This program will be hosted by the Sustainable Ag Task Force, an educational program committee of Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and held at the Echo Hotel in Edinburg. This luncheon meeting will begin with a buffet lunch at 11:45 a.m. and Dr. Jifon's program will start about 12:10. Cost of the lunch is \$14.00, including gratuity. This program is open to the public and anyone interested in vegetable production is especially encouraged to attend. If you can not join us for lunch, you are welcomed to attend Dr. Jifon's presentation. For more information, contact the Extension office at (956) 383-1026.

Next week we will continue our discussion about ways to enjoy container gardening.

Barbara Storz is an Extension educator for Texas AgriLife Extension Service, part of Texas A & M University. She can be reached at her Hidalgo County office at (956) 383-1026 or by e-mail at b-storz@tamu.edu.