



## GARDENING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

University of Illinois Extension: Cook County

Chances are the variety being advertised as a "Giant Tree Tomato" is botanically known as *Cyphomandra betacea*, a very different species from garden tomatoes. This tree "tomato" is a tropical, semi-woody shrub that reaches up to 10 feet, but the fruit is more tart and jelly-like than our garden tomato. People of other cultures know it as xd.

Moreover, this plant is subtropical (native to the Andes Mountains of Peru and Chile) and is not hardy to Illinois. It requires a minimum temperature of 25 degrees F., preferably 50 degrees F. for fruiting, which means USDA Hardiness Zones 9b at least. Here in Chicago we are typically Zones 5a or 5b.

It's always wise to read all the fine print in these ads, since very often this type of thing is a scam, or at best a very bad financial proposition. In many cases, all you will receive is a single seed that is planted in a pot full of soil, at about \$3.50 each (plus shipping). Remember that old adage: if it's too good to be true, it probably is!

If you are looking for a good variety of "big" tomato to grow in Chicago's summers, we'd recommend a beefsteak such as "Big Beef". You can purchase seeds, or even seedlings, of this variety from many sources.

Happy Gardening,

The Chicago Master Gardeners

<http://tinyurl.com/chimastergardeners>