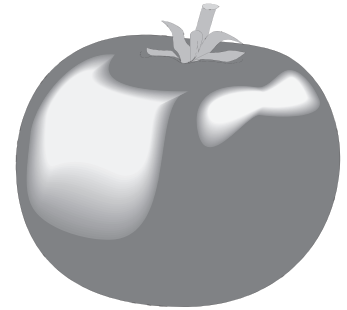


Tomatoes

Lycopersicon esculentum

*Home grown tomatoes, home grown tomatoes
What would life be like without homegrown tomatoes?
Only two things that money can't buy
That's true love and home grown tomatoes.*

John Denver, 'Home Grown Tomatoes'
(From a song written by Guy Clark)



Nutrition:

Tomatoes are an excellent source of potassium, vitamin A, and vitamin C, while also providing calcium, iron and fiber. In addition, tomatoes provide beta-carotene and an antioxidant called lycopene. According to a study by the National Cancer Institute, a tomato-rich diet is associated with a decreased risk of prostate cancer. Lycopene may also fight heart disease. Eating tomato paste and tomato sauce is a good way to get more lycopene than eating fresh tomatoes, only because the lycopene is more concentrated in these forms. Serving tomatoes with a bit of oil, whether the tomatoes are raw or cooked, makes it easier for the body to absorb lycopene. (1,2,5)

Varieties:

Although there are thousands of tomato varieties, the most common are the cherry tomato, the slicing tomato and the plum tomato. **Cherry** tomatoes are small, bite-sized tomatoes most frequently used in salads or on vegetable platters. They can be red, yellow or orange in color. **Slicing** tomatoes are the large, round varieties most often found in grocery stores, but also include the popular "Beefsteak" tomatoes grown in many home gardens. They are best for slicing and serving raw, as their high water content makes them less suitable for cooking. **Plum** tomatoes, also known as Roma tomatoes, are smaller and egg-shaped. They are "meatier" than slicing tomatoes, which makes them particularly well suited for making tomato sauces and for using in recipes which call for the tomatoes to be cooked. Other varieties of tomato are also becoming more popular. These include the **Grape** tomato, which is similar to the cherry tomato, though a bit larger and sweeter in flavor, and **Yellow** and **Orange** tomatoes which are higher in sugar and have a mild, sweet flavor. (1,5)

Storage:

Tomatoes should be stored at room temperature until they have ripened and should be stored out of direct sunlight to keep them from ripening unevenly. Properly ripened tomatoes will have the best flavor and aroma. To hasten the ripening of tomatoes, you can place them in a paper bag along with an apple or banana. The ethylene gas given off by the fruit will help the tomatoes ripen faster. Once ripe, tomatoes should be used within a day or two, though they can also be stored in the refrigerator. If you refrigerate tomatoes, be sure to let them come to room temperature again before serving. (1,5)

Preparation:

Gently wash tomatoes under cold water before preparing for cooking or serving fresh. Some recipes call for tomatoes to be **seeded**. Simply cut the tomato in half crosswise and gently squeeze out the juice and seeds. For baked or stuffed tomatoes, **well drained tomatoes** will give the best result: salt them lightly and place them, cut side down, on paper toweling. Other recipes call for tomatoes to be **peeled**. The easiest way is to place them in a pot of boiling water and blanch them for 15 to 30 seconds, depending on the hardness of the tomatoes. After blanching, remove the tomatoes with a slotted spoon and place them in a bowl of ice water. Once cooled, the skins will peel off easily. If you are doing many tomatoes, blanch them a few at a time instead of all at once. (3,5)

Cooking Methods:

Bake: Unless the recipe calls for whole tomatoes, cut the tomatoes in half. Stuffed tomatoes can be prepared whole, or halved. Either way, the tomatoes will have to be “scooped” out to remove the juice, seeds and cores. Lightly sprinkle with salt and place cut side down on paper towels to remove as much of the juice as possible. There are a variety of stuffing possibilities, including rice, grains, vegetables, pasta or a breadcrumb stuffing. Be careful not to overcook the tomatoes as they are likely to split and fall apart. Cooking time: 8 to 15 minutes in a 400 degree oven.

Broil: Place seeded and halved tomatoes on a broiler pan and broil for 5 minutes. Broiled tomatoes are excellent when sprinkled with some breadcrumbs, fresh herbs, grated cheese and a little olive oil before broiling.

Grill: Use plum tomatoes that have been halved, or slicing tomatoes cut into 1/2-inch slices. Brush them lightly with oil, sprinkle with herbs and grill for about 5 minutes.

Sauté: Sauté chopped plum tomatoes or halved cherry tomatoes in hot olive oil until they are tender. Tomatoes are excellent when sautéed with minced garlic and some fresh herbs. Cooking time: 1 to 2 minutes.

Stew: Seed and peel tomatoes as described under "Preparation", then place them in a pot with some water, broth or vegetable juice. Only a little liquid is needed to keep the tomatoes from burning before they release their own juices. Season the tomatoes with some salt, a pinch of sugar and some fresh or dried herbs, then cover and cook until the tomatoes are soft. Cooking time: 10 minutes.

(3,4,5)

Tips and Suggestions:

- * **Baked tomatoes** will hold their shape better if cooked in oiled muffin tins, to hold them upright.
- * Tomatoes are tasty and colorful when added to **sandwiches, salads and omelettes**.
- * Cooked tomatoes make an excellent base for **soups, stews** and **pasta sauces**.
- * Make **salsa sauce** using fresh tomatoes.
- * Cherry tomatoes make a nutritious, **instant snack**.
- * **Prevent soggy sandwiches** and salads by adding sliced or diced tomatoes at the last minute.
- * **Green tomatoes** can be used in special "green tomato" recipes. However, they can also often be ripened. To ripen green tomatoes, place them in a dark location (such as a dark pantry or in a root cellar) and cover with a layer of newspaper. The tomatoes will ripen gradually. Be sure to check them on a regular basis and remove any that start to go bad. Trying to ripen green tomatoes on a window sill will only turn them red on the outside, instead of ripening them on the inside.

(1,3,5)

Yields:

1 pound fresh tomatoes =

3 cups sliced 1/2-inch thick

2 cups quartered or cubed

1³/₄ cups diced

1¹/₂ cups pureed

Joy of Gardening Cookbook