

NUTRITION To Go

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FOOD PANTRY

Produce Spotlight: Tomatoes

One of the most anticipated moments of the year is the first ripe tomato. July is usually when that happens. Do you enjoy your fresh tomatoes with a sprinkling of sugar (like my mom) or salt? How about a fresh tomato sandwich? Or a BLT? Any way you slice it, the first fresh tomato is an occasion to celebrate!

Storage: Tomatoes are best stored on your counter. Refrigerate only if they begin to develop spots—refrigeration causes them to lose their flavor.

Ripening: Tomatoes do not need the sun to ripen, but they are the most flavorful and nutritious if they ripen on the vine.

Health Benefits: Tomatoes are the primary dietary source of the antioxidant lycopene, which has been linked to many health benefits, including reduced risk of heart disease and cancer. They are also a great source of vitamin C, potassium, folate, and vitamin K and fiber. Usually red when mature, tomatoes also can come in a variety of colors, including yellow, orange, green, and purple.

From Britannica.com: Is a Tomato a Fruit or a vegetable? It's both! Tomatoes are fruits that are considered vegetables by nutritionists. Botanically, a fruit is a ripened flower ovary and contains seeds. Tomatoes, plums, zucchinis, and melons are all edible fruits, but things like maple "helicopters" and floating dandelion puffs are fruits too. For some reason, people got hung up on tomatoes, but the "fruit or vegetable" question could also work for any vegetable with seeds.

Nutritionally, the term "fruit" is used to describe sweet and fleshy botanical fruits, and "vegetable" is used to indicate a wide variety of plant parts that are not so high in fructose. In many cultures, vegetables tend to be served as part of the main dish or side, whereas sweet fruits are typically snacks or desserts. Thus, roots, tubers, stems, flower buds, leaves, and certain botanical fruits, including green beans, pumpkins, and of course tomatoes, are all considered vegetables by nutritionists. There is no hard-and-fast rule that clearly designates a botanical fruit as a vegetable, but, given that tomatoes are generally not used in desserts and are closely related to other fruit-vegetables (e.g., eggplants and peppers), it is not too counterintuitive for tomatoes to be classified as vegetables.



Best Fresh Tomato Salsa

allrecipes.com

3 cups chopped tomatoes
1/2 cup chopped green bell pepper
1 cup onion, diced
1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
4 teaspoons chopped fresh jalapeno pepper (including seeds) or 1/2 tsp. red pepper flakes
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Stir the tomatoes, green pepper, onion, cilantro, lime juice, jalapeno pepper, cumin, salt, and pepper in a bowl. Serve with your favorite chips. Gets better as the flavors meld.

Marinated Cucumber, Onion, and Tomato Salad

allrecipes.com

Whisk together 1 c. water, 1/2 c. distilled white vinegar, 1/4 c. vegetable oil, 1/4 c. sugar or 1/4 tsp. artificial sweetener, 2 tsp. salt, and 1 tsp. ground black pepper. Add 3 cucumbers, peeled and sliced 1/4-inch thick, 3 tomatoes, cut into wedges, and 1 onion, sliced and separated into rings, and stir to coat. Cover bowl with plastic wrap; refrigerate at least 2 hrs.

Rules for Leftovers

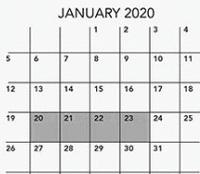
2 Hours — 2 Inches — 4 Days



2 Hours from oven to refrigerator. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within 2 hours of cooking. Otherwise throw them away.



2 Inches thick to cool it quick. Store food at a shallow depth—about 2 inches—to speed chilling.



4 Days in the refrigerator—otherwise freeze it. Use leftovers from the refrigerator within 4 days. Reheat solid leftovers to 165°F and liquid leftovers to a rolling boil.

Quick Tomato Sauce

- 1 28-ounce (or two 14-oz.) can chopped tomatoes
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed (or 1/2 tsp. garlic powder)
- 1/4 c. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano (or Italian seasoning)

DIRECTIONS

1. In medium bowl, combine all ingredients and let sit for about 20 minutes to allow flavors to meld. Can also be cooked
2. Sauce can be made ahead of time and kept covered in refrigerator for up to 3 days or frozen up to 3 mos.

Makes 4 cups

Dave Lieberman/Food Network

Loaves & Fishes



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How to Pick a Watermelon

Start with a ripe watermelon that isn't super big. The



larger the melon, the harder it will be to handle and cut. Although it is hard to be 100% sure watermelon is ripe, there are a few signs that will make it easier to tell. Here are three questions you should ask yourself when picking a watermelon:

1. Is it heavy? Pick up the watermelon. No matter the size, it should feel heavy.
2. Does it have a yellow spot? Watermelons develop a yellowish spot where they rest on the ground. That spot will be a creamy yellow when it is ripe.
3. Does it sound hollow? Give the watermelon a good thump. Ripe melons will have a deep hollow sound.

Always Wash It First

1. Give the watermelon a good wash to remove any dirt and lingering bacteria on the rind. Once you cut the melon, you don't want dirt getting on the melon's flesh. Pat it dry and lay it on a cutting board.
2. Grab a heavy, sharp knife with a blade that's almost as wide as the melon. It is important to use a sharp knife.

How to Cut a Watermelon

1. Hold the watermelon steady with one hand. Cut off each end of the watermelon—cut off enough peel to expose the watermelon's flesh underneath.
2. Stand the watermelon on one of the flat sides. Removing the ends creates a stable base so the watermelon will stay still when you cut it. It also allows you to see where the watermelon rind ends, and the fruit begins so you can judge how big to cut the slices. Cut the watermelon in half lengthwise. Then, cut each side in half lengthwise. You should have four quarter sections of watermelon.
3. Lay one of the quarter pieces rind-side down. Slice the watermelon into one- to 1 1/2-inch slices. Serve the watermelon at room temperature or cover with plastic wrap and chill for a few hours before serving.

Tip: Watermelons will keep best uncut. If you don't plan to eat it all in a day or so, wrap one half in plastic and refrigerate.

Debbie Wolfe (Chowhound)

Ask Monica

- Q: Where do you get the food Loaves & Fishes distributes?
A: We are fortunate to receive food from many different sources. Local grocery stores donate food near its expiration date. Families and farms donate their excess produce and eggs. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank provides USDA commodities and other large donations. Local churches, individuals and non-profits donate food and supplies from food drives. During COVID-19, we also have had donations from restaurants, colleges, and local bakeries.