



Vegetables for Wellness: Kentucky Tomatoes

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Nothing tastes better than a Kentucky-grown tomato in the summer! From July through October, Kentuckians can enjoy the freshness and flavor of locally grown tomatoes picked at peak ripeness. Botanically, the tomato is the fruit of a vine native to South America. But the tomato was classified as a vegetable by the U.S. government in 1893, for trade purposes. Dozens of tomato varieties are available today, including standard-sized round, plum (Italian plum), pear-shaped, and cherry varieties. They range widely in size, shape, and color.

Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens—1999 (ID-133), a publication by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, has more information on successful Kentucky varieties. It can be viewed at www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/agpubs.htm.

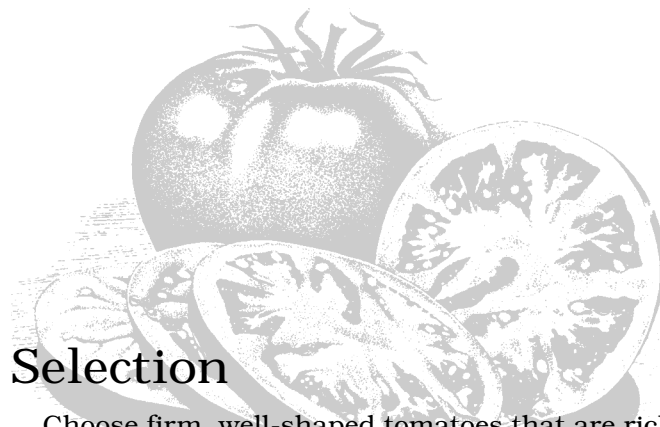
Nutrition Facts

There are lots of nutritional reasons for using all the tomatoes that come in from the garden. Tomatoes are packed with vitamins that promote health and phytochemicals that fight disease. Plus, a medium tomato has as much fiber as a slice of whole-wheat bread—2 grams—and only 35 calories.

Tomatoes are also a major source of vitamins C and A, which have great potential for preventing disease because they are strong antioxidants.

Vitamin C, also known as ascorbic acid, plays a vital role in fighting infection, keeping gums healthy, and healing wounds. One medium tomato meets 40 percent of our daily need for vitamin C.

Vitamin A is needed for vision, normal growth, reproduction, and a healthy immune system. Tomatoes and other foods of plant origin contain carotenoids, which are converted into vitamin A. Some of the better known carotenoids in tomatoes are beta-carotene and lycopene. Carotenoids also give tomatoes their bright rosy color. A medium tomato supplies about 20 percent of our daily need for vitamin A.



Selection

Choose firm, well-shaped tomatoes that are rich in color and fragrant. Tomatoes should be free from blemishes, be heavy for their size, and give slightly to pressure. Italian plum tomatoes make the best canned tomatoes because they have more solids and hold together better. You should be able to purchase enough good-quality tomatoes in the quantity you need at farmers' markets, which usually have a good selection.

Storage

Store ripe tomatoes at room temperature and use them within three days. Tomatoes that are light pink in color should be ripe in three to five days. Keep tomatoes out of direct sunlight and store them with the stem up to prevent bruised shoulders. Do not refrigerate tomatoes, because cold temperatures make tomato flesh pulpy and damage the flavor. You can ripen green tomatoes by placing them for several days in a pierced, food-grade paper bag at room temperature. This method works because tomatoes naturally produce the gas ethylene, which hastens ripening in a confined space.

Preparation

Always wash fresh tomatoes in cool running water, wiping off visible signs of dirt. Remove the core and peel, if you like. Here are general rules to help you know how many tomatoes to prepare:

- Three to four medium tomatoes weigh about 1 pound.
- One pound of fresh tomatoes will yield 2½ cups of chopped tomatoes or 3 cups of wedged or sliced tomatoes.
- One pound of peeled and seeded tomatoes will produce about 1½ cups of pulp.
- One bushel of tomatoes contains 53 pounds and yields 15 to 20 quarts of tomatoes or 12 to 16 quarts of tomato juice.

Canning instructions are outlined in the UK Cooperative Extension publication *Selecting, Preparing, and Canning Tomatoes and Tomato Products* (FCS 3-327). This publication is available at <www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/hepubs.htm> or from your local Extension office.

To peel: Peeling fresh tomatoes is not necessary. However, since heat causes the skins to slip away from the flesh, cooked tomatoes are often peeled. Submerge the tomatoes in a pan of boiling water for about 30 seconds. Transfer the tomatoes to cold water, and the skins will slip off.

To seed: Tomato seeds contain nutritional qualities, so avoid seeding tomatoes if possible. Scrape seeds away from the flesh of the tomato with a pointed utensil, such as a grapefruit spoon. Avoid puncturing the skin of the tomato.

To slice: Slice tomatoes lengthwise instead of crosswise to retain the juice. A serrated knife works best.

To broil: Halve crosswise. Dot lightly with margarine and sprinkle with an herb mixture. Broil until tomatoes are tender and the topping is lightly browned.

To bake: Halve crosswise. Dot lightly with margarine and season as desired. Bake at 425°F for 10 to 15 minutes.

To roast: Slice crosswise 1/2- to 3/4-inch thick. Place on aluminum foil-lined baking sheets. Generously rub the foil with olive oil. Season as desired. Roast at 325°F until the tomatoes shrivel, the edges start to turn brown, and most of the liquid around the tomatoes has caramelized—about one hour. Store in the refrigerator for up to three days.

To microwave: Halve crosswise. Dot lightly with margarine and season as desired. Microwave on high power (100%) 3 to 4 minutes for four halves or 5 to 6 minutes for six to eight halves.

To stew: Place peeled tomatoes (whole or cut up) in a small pan without water. Season with a pinch of salt, pepper, and sugar; add diced onion or green pepper if desired. Tightly cover and simmer on low until done, about 10 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

To stuff: Cut off the stem end of the tomato and scoop out seeds and pulp. Sprinkle the cavity lightly with salt and turn upside down on a paper towel to drain. Stuff with your favorite salad of seafood, meat, or pasta.

Fresh Tomato Sauce

5 large ripe tomatoes, peeled
1/2 cup fresh basil, finely chopped
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, finely minced
Salt and black pepper, to taste

Finely dice and seed the tomatoes. Stir in the basil, olive oil, garlic, salt, and pepper. Allow mixture to marinate for 30 minutes. Serve at room temperature. For added flavor, sprinkle each portion with 1 to 2 teaspoons of balsamic vinegar. Yield: 6 servings, over 1 pound pasta.

Nutritional Analysis: 88 calories, 1 g protein, 6 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 7 g fat, 204 mg sodium.

Fresh Tomato Salad

3 medium tomatoes, sliced
5 green onions, chopped
1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
1 tablespoon chopped chives
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper, to taste

Lay sliced tomatoes in a flat, shallow dish. Sprinkle with onions, parsley, and chives. Sprinkle tomatoes with oil and vinegar. Serve immediately or chill briefly in refrigerator. Yield: 5 servings.
Nutritional Analysis: 69 calories, 1 g protein, 5 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 6 g fat, 243 mg sodium.
—From the LaRue County Cooperative Extension Service.

For additional in-season recipes, check the home page of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, at <www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs/>.

References

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