

## Using & Storing Tomatoes

Tomatoes are actually fruits, but most people eat them like vegetables. South Carolina-grown tomatoes are at their prime June through September.

### Tomatoes are Good for You

#### Tomatoes are:

- a good source of vitamins A and C.
- low in calories and sodium.

### How to Buy Tomatoes

Choose red or reddish-orange tomatoes that "give" very slightly to gentle pressure. Do not buy bruised, soft or moldy tomatoes.

- One pound equals:
- 2 cups chopped.
- 3 medium tomatoes.

### How to Store Tomatoes

- Handle gently to avoid bruising.
- If tomatoes need to ripen, place them in a loosely closed paper bag at room temperature. Check daily.
- If a tomato develops any mold, throw it away.
- When tomatoes are ripe, they can be served immediately or stored in the refrigerator. Ripe tomatoes will usually keep 2-3 days under refrigeration. For best flavor, bring tomatoes to room temperature before serving.

### Ripening Green Tomatoes

Just before frost occurs in the fall, harvest green tomatoes from the home garden and ripen them indoors. Select fruits from strong healthy vines, remove stems, and, if dirty, gently wash and air dry.

Sort tomatoes into 3 different stages of maturity: those showing red, mature green, and green. Mature green tomatoes are full-sized and light green to

whitish in color. Pack tomatoes of similar maturity into boxes or trays. If packing two layers deep, place black and white newspaper between the layers. Tomatoes can be wrapped individually to overcome the lower humidity in most homes.

Store in a cool, dry location. Too much humidity causes decay and too little humidity causes shriveling. As tomatoes ripen, they naturally release ethylene gas, which stimulates ripening. To slow ripening, sort tomatoes every 7 to 10 days to separate the red and green ones, disposing of any rotted fruit at the same time. To speed up ripening, place a ripe tomato in the box with partially ripe or green fruits.

Mature green tomatoes will reach eating stage in 14 days when stored at 65-70 °F. or in 25-28 days when stored at 55 °F. (Do not expose unripe tomatoes to temperatures below 50 °F.) To complete the ripening process, bring almost-ripe tomatoes to room temperature for a few days prior to using.

### How to Use Tomatoes

Peeling fresh tomatoes is not necessary, although some cooks prefer it. To peel fresh tomatoes, dip them in boiling water for about 30 seconds or until skins split. Remove with slotted spoon and dip in cold water. The skins will come off easily.

- **To Slice:** Use a serrated knife. To retain juice, slice tomatoes lengthwise rather than crosswise.
- **To Stuff:** Cut top off crosswise and scoop out seeds and juice. Fill tomato with cottage cheese or chicken, tuna, or egg salad. Sprinkle paprika on top.
- **To Bake:** Cut top off crosswise, sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and season as desired. Bake 10-15 minutes on a baking sheet at 425 °F.

Besides adding fresh sliced or chopped tomatoes to salads, try adding them to these dishes, just before serving:

- nachos
- burritos
- spaghetti
- scrambled eggs
- pizza
- chili
- macaroni and cheese

Children may find eating cherry and grape tomatoes fun. Quarter them to reduce risk of choking.

## Tomato Recipes

### Sliced Tomato Antipasto:

1 medium tomato  
1 to 2 ounces mozzarella cheese  
½ tsp. basil or oregano  
black pepper  
1 Tbsp. light Italian dressing

**Directions:** Slice tomatoes and top with thinly sliced mozzarella cheese. Sprinkle with basil or oregano and black pepper. Drizzle with dressing. Serves 2.

Calories: 126 per serving  
Fat: 8 grams per serving

### Garden Veggies Italian Style:

1 onion, chopped  
1 summer squash, diced (yellow or zucchini)  
1 tomato, diced  
1 green pepper, chopped  
1 8-ounce can tomato sauce  
1 pinch of oregano  
½ cup mozzarella cheese, shredded

**Directions:** Combine vegetables in a baking dish. Sprinkle with oregano. Pour on tomato sauce. Bake uncovered at 350 °F. for 20 to 30 minutes. Top with cheese and bake another 4 to 5 minutes until cheese is melted. Serves 6.

Calories: 60 per serving  
Fat: 2 grams per serving

### Salsa Ranchero:

1 pound fresh tomatoes (about 3 medium)  
½ cup finely chopped onion

1 tsp. minced garlic (or ½ tsp. garlic powder)  
1 to 2 Tbsps. finely chopped jalapeno peppers (see note)  
2 to 4 Tbsps. chopped fresh cilantro (or fresh parsley)  
½ tsp. salt  
lime juice to taste (try a Tbsp. at a time)

**Directions:** Cut tomatoes in half crosswise and remove seeds and juice. Finely chop the tomato pulp, and combine with the remaining ingredients. The salsa will have a "crisper" texture if made just before serving. Makes 2½ cups.

**Note:** Thoroughly wash hands immediately after chopping hot chili peppers. The juice will sting if it gets into eyes or cuts on hands.

Calories: 12 per ¼ cup serving  
Fat: 0 grams per ¼ cup serving

### Primary Source:

University of Illinois Extension fact sheet, Using and Storing Tomatoes, originally developed by Michigan State University Extension.  
<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/edwardsvillecenter/FactSheets/FS%20Tomatoes.pdf>

### Supplementary Information from:

1. University of Minnesota Extension Service. *Ripening Tomatoes and Green Peppers Indoors*. 1993/99/2005. [www.extension.umn.edu/info-u/nutrition/BJ763.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/info-u/nutrition/BJ763.html)
2. Kansas State Research and Extension. *Storing Tomatoes Has Its Benefits*. November 2004. [www.oznet.ksu.edu/news/sty/2004/storing\\_tomatoes110304.htm](http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/news/sty/2004/storing_tomatoes110304.htm)
3. Michigan State University Extension. *Storing Tomatoes*. August 1999. <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/imp/mod01/01600202.html>

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This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by J. G. Hunter, HGIC Nutrition Specialist, and K. L. Cason, Professor, State EFNEP Coordinator, Clemson University. (New 09/05.)

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