



Tomatoes are abundant this time of year and tomato dishes are easy to prepare.

Summer tomatoes are all-time salad favorites

Simple, yet colorful salads with fresh tomatoes can be a welcome change from the omnipresent "tossed greens." To make sure the tomatoes you pick, however, it's usually necessary to "brighten" them yourself at home. To reach this point leave them out on the kitchen counter for a few days until they're ready. You'll know... they'll be a true tomato-red and yield slightly to the touch. By all means, don't refrigerate them; it kills the flavor.

Monterey Tomato Salad makes a great combination with cold cuts for a buffet lunch or a fine salad-stuffer in tacos or pita bread. The blending of diced Monterey Jack cheese, red onion and Tex-Mex seasonings of chili powder, garlic and black pepper in the dressing makes a nice foil for the tomatoes' flavor and texture.

Another high-color salad is broccoli florets and strips of red and green pepper with the diced tomatoes. They're all coated in a lemon and oil dressing spiced with garlic

and Italian seasoning. The broccoli is only cooked for three minutes so it still remains crunchy.

MONTEREY TOMATO SALAD

4 medium-sized tomatoes
1 medium-sized red onion, sliced
lettuce leaves
1/2 cup diced or shredded Monterey Jack cheese
1/2 cup vegetable oil
2 tbsp. vinegar
1 tsp. chili powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. garlic powder
pinch ground black pepper

Use tomatoes held at room temperature until fully ripe. Remove cores and slice 1/4-inch thick. Arrange tomatoes and onions in any desired pattern on a lettuce lined serving platter. Sprinkle with cheese. Combine oil, vinegar, chili powder, salt, garlic and black pepper; spoon dressing over salad.

Yield: 4 portions.

RAINBOW TOMATO SALAD

3 tbsp. vegetable oil
2 tbsp. lemon juice
1/4 tsp. Italian seasoning, crushed
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. garlic powder
ground black pepper
water
1 cup broccoli florets
1 cup red pepper strips
1 cup green pepper strips
3 large-sized tomatoes

In a medium bowl combine oil, lemon juice, Italian seasoning, salt, garlic and black pepper. In a large skillet bring 1 inch water to the boil. Add broccoli; simmer, covered, 1 minute. Add red and green peppers; simmer, covered, until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Drain well and toss with reserved dressing. Cover and refrigerate until chilled or overnight. Just before serving remove cores from tomatoes and cut in 1/4-inch chunks (makes 3 cups). Add to marinated vegetables; toss lightly. YIELD: 4 portions, 4 cups.

Too many tomatoes? surplus easily frozen

The annual tomato harvest can sometimes seem like too much of a good thing.

Plump, flavorful tomatoes can grow profusely in nearly any climate. In fact, more than 90 percent of home gardeners raise tomatoes and even without home gardens, tomato lovers have easy access to an abundance of fresh tomatoes during the harvest season.

Most people find that they grow for more than they can consume. There's a simple solution for preserving a stock of fresh tomatoes to enjoy year-round: freeze them.

With a minimum of time and equipment, tomatoes can be frozen whole; or quartered and blanched; sautéed or stewed; then stored in heavy-duty freezer bags for up to 9 months. Home economists have provided the following tips for freezing and storing tomatoes.

• Fully ripe tomatoes may be kept in the refrigerator for several weeks. Do not place immature tomatoes in the refrigerator, store at room temperature to allow for maturing, preferably away from sunlight. Storing in a paper bag also works well.

• Select firm, ripe tomatoes with brilliant color for freezing. Check to be sure that there are no bruises or spots.

• Freezing tomatoes usually makes them too soft to serve raw. Tomatoes freeze especially well in a sauce or relish mixture. To make sauce or relish, remove stem ends, quarter, peel and cook until tender, according to cookbook directions.

• To freeze tomato sauce or relish, cool, seal in heavy duty freezer bags. Remove excess air while sealing to help preserve fresh flavor and nutrients.

• Be sure to label bags with date, contents and number of servings.

• Place sealed bags of tomato

mixture in a freezer at zero degrees F. or lower. Add a maximum of 2 to 3 pounds of food per cubic foot of freezer space per 24 hours. This allows the safest, most efficient use of the freezer.

• To expedite freezing, position bags along freezer walls, and let air circulate among them. Once solid, the transparent bags stack easily for convenient, space saving storage.

• Thaw frozen tomatoes gradually for 8 to 12 hours in the refrigerator to lessen the opportunity for texture change.

BOTH VETERAN and novice canners need to remember that tomato acidity is a very important factor in safe homecanning, because the organism that causes botulism poisoning can grow and multiply in home canned, low-acid foods.

Researchers have found that different varieties of tomatoes all fall in the same acidity range. Newer varieties, as well as white and yellow tomatoes, contain as much acid as most of the standard red tomatoes.

Studies have uncovered some conditions that reduce the normal acid content of tomatoes, however.

Overripe or damaged tomatoes should not be used for home canning or for juice. Their acid content is much lower than that of ripe, undamaged fruit. They can be eaten fresh, however, or heated and then used in a frozen product.

Tomatoes grown in the shade or those that ripen off the vine are lower in acid than those that ripen on the vine in direct sunlight in the garden.

Tomatoes that ripen on dead vines are less acidic than those harvested from healthy vines and should not be canned.

If you buy your canning tomatoes rather than grow them yourself, it is impossible to know under what con-

ditions they were grown or ripened. In those instances, it is a good idea to play it safe and add acid when whatever bath processing tomatoes or you can pressure can your tomatoes without using either salt or acid.

One common way to increase the acid content is by adding two tablespoons of bottled lemon juice from concentrate (not fresh lemon juice) for each quart of tomatoes.

Other acid supplements are: crystalline citric acid monohydrate, U.S.P., which is found in pharmacies; tomato acidification tablets, available at retail stores; and an ascorbic-citric acid mixture.

For more information about canning safety, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service home economist.

The following recipe for sweet and sour Tomato Relish provides a great method for preserving the tomato harvest. The relish is simple to prepare and is a snappy addition to meat, poultry or fish entrees.

SWEET AND SOUR TOMATO RELISH

2 cups chopped tomato (about 2 large tomatoes)
1 cup chopped celery
1 cup chopped green pepper
1/4 cup chopped onion
1/4 cup cider vinegar
2 tbsp. currant jelly
1/4 tsp. ground cloves
1/4 tsp. salt

1 freezer bag (quart size)
Combine tomato, celery, green pepper, onion, vinegar, currant jelly, cloves and salt in a 2-quart glass measuring pitcher. Cook uncovered in microwave oven 30 minutes at HIGH, or until desired thickness; stir every 5 minutes. Cool. Pour into heavy duty freezer bag, press to remove air and seal. Store in freezer.

When ready to use, remove bag from freezer and refrigerate overnight to defrost. Serve cold.

Olive oil is graded for flavor

Standing in the food store, contemplating the wide variety of olive oils on the shelf, the smart shopper stops to question what the real differences are inside those intriguing containers and bottles. Uniquely, olive oil is the only cooking and salad oil with a variety of flavors. Just as wines vary in taste from the use of different grapes from different regions, olive oil flavor varies from the diversity of olive trees, climates and

the soil in which the trees are cultivated.

Olive oils are "graded," reflecting the level of oleic acid found in the oil and their various standards of flavor. "Extra virgin" oil must contain only one percent acidity, while "virgin" must contain no more than 3.3 percent acidity. Oils labeled "pure" have been purified and blended with some extra virgin oil to enhance their flavor.

Different olive oils work well

for different recipes. A less expensive, milder flavored "pure" or "virgin" oil is suggested for frying and baking. When smaller amounts are called for, such as in basting meats and dressing salads, explore the wide range of rich flavors found in the more expensive "extra virgin" oil.

So, the next time you find yourself trying to choose an olive oil, try several, and taste the difference.

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