

IT'S TOMATO TIME

GARDENING SEASON

Mid-July to October

CHOOSING TIPS

Look for well-formed tomatoes that are smooth and reasonably free from blemishes. A perfectly ripe tomato will be completely red, have a sweet subtle aroma and be firm but not hard. Use imperfect tomatoes in cooking, but check carefully and cut off:



- ⌚ Bruised areas
- ⌚ Green or yellow areas
- ⌚ Growth cracks
- ⌚ Water-soaked spots

STORAGE

Keep tomatoes at room temperature, away from dust and sunlight. Refrigerate only when overripe if you cannot use them immediately. Green tomatoes can be ripened by holding at room temperature, away from sunlight. To ripen more quickly, put them into a paper bag.

PREPARATION

Wash tomatoes in cold water and then cut out stem ends (do not cut out stem of cherry tomatoes). Tomatoes can be peeled if desired. The most common way of slicing tomatoes is crosswise. However, slicing vertically from the stem end to the blossom end also makes nice slices, with less loss of seeds and juice.

To Peel:

Cut shallow crosses in the blossom ends. Lower tomatoes into boiling water for 15 to 30 seconds. Remove from hot water, and cool in cold water. The skin should peel off easily from the cut area using a knife.

SERVING IDEAS

Tomatoes are delicious served fresh in salads, on sandwiches, or eaten "as is." They can be stuffed, stewed, fried, baked and used in sauces, casseroles and soups.

KEY NUTRIENTS

- ⌚ Vitamin C for healthy gums, skin and blood.
- ⌚ Potassium to help maintain normal blood pressure.
- ⌚ Antioxidant lycopene which may prevent certain types of cancer.

RECIPES

Stuffed Tomato Salad

1 tomato
1 rounded tablespoon low-fat cottage cheese
1 tablespoon green pepper, chopped
Cut off top of tomato (stem end) and remove seeds. Cut from top halfway down as if making wedges. Chop green peppers and mix with cottage cheese. Place mixture in tomato. Chill and serve.
Serves 1; 40 Cal; 0.5 g fat.

Salsa

2 medium tomatoes, chopped
4 ounce can green chiles, chopped
1 cup corn
½ cup onion, chopped
½ teaspoon each: chili powder and sugar
¼ teaspoon each: oregano and salt
⅛teaspoon cayenne pepper
Combine all ingredients. Cover tightly. Cook on stovetop (about 20 minutes) until boiling. Refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving. Serves 10; 25 Cal; <1 g fat.



Growing Tomatoes in Wisconsin

Tomatoes have become the second most popular vegetable in the United States. Tomatoes along with peppers, potatoes, and eggplants belong to the Solanaceae (nightshade) family. Tomatoes are warm-season perennials that are grown as annuals in cold climates. Plants may be determinate, semi-determinate, or indeterminate. Determinate plants are more compact and produce all fruit at once. Indeterminate plants are vining and flower over an extended period of time.



Planting Tomatoes

- Typically started in a greenhouse due to the need for a long, warm growing season
- Start plants from seed 4 to 6 weeks prior to field transplanting
- Protect plants if temperature may drop below 40° to 45° F
- Move flats to a cold frame before transplanting
- Plant outside once the threat of frost has passed around June 1st
- Optimum day temperature is 75°F while optimum night temperature is 68°F
- Tomatoes thrive in full sun
- Space between rows: 36 to 42 inches
- Space between plants: 18 to 36 inches

Soil and Fertility

- Light, warm, well drained fertile soils
- Avoid muck soils
- Follow soil test recommendations
- Acceptable pH is 5.5 to 7.5, however 6.8 to 7.0 is recommended

Soil and Fertility continued ...

Under optimum soil test levels apply...

4.5 oz of nitrogen per 100 sq ft

1.5 oz of phosphate per 100 sq ft

6.75 oz of potassium per 100 sq ft

Selecting Tomatoes Varieties

A wide assortment of tomato varieties are available. Fruit color, size, and disease resistance are all factors to consider when selecting varieties. In addition to differences in growth habit, tomato categories include early crop, main crop, paste, and cherry (small fruited). Heirloom tomatoes offer a full flavor and unique characteristics but are more susceptible to diseases and malformed fruit. Low acid tomatoes are yet another option.

Handling Your Tomatoes

Vine ripened, sweet, fresh tomatoes typically are the strongest produce attraction at farmers markets. Tomatoes harvested while still green require about 10 days to turn red. Handle tomatoes gently since they bruise easily. Use caution when hydro cooling fruit in a water bath because once fruit has chilled, it will not ripen further. Tomatoes may be wiped clean.

Pack tomatoes in shallow boxes or trays. Do not stack fruit higher than two layers deep. Do not allow ice to touch fruit otherwise injury will occur. Best flavor will remain 2 to 3 days after harvest. Ripe tomatoes can be stored for 2 weeks at cool temperatures above 55° F and in 85-90% humidity. Green fruit may be stored for 6 weeks.