

Truly Tomatoes



"Tomatoes?!?!?" I hear you say.... "A Superfood?? You've got to be kidding me!!" Tomatoes are one of the world's most popular foods and a favourite among kids and home gardeners. They are technically fruits, but were declared vegetables in 1893, a legal definition based on their use (regular mealtime instead of dessert, like most fruits).

Tomatoes have made it to the list of Superfoods largely because they are a primary source of Lycopene, an anti-oxidant phyto-nutrient that has been closely associated with preventing life-threatening diseases including cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Choosing a supplement instead of the real thing is not as effective because other nutrients contained in tomatoes work together to produce disease-preventing qualities.

This ubiquitous vegetable also is an excellent source of Vitamins A and C, plus a good source of Vitamin B6, niacin, folate, potassium and fiber.

Lycopene is fat soluble, making it more available to the body when consumed along with a fat source. Among the popular choices are avocados (often used in salsas) or olive oil (a stand-by in Mediterranean cooking). These plant-based, mono-unsaturated fats are not only good for you, they combine well flavor-wise with tomatoes.

Cooking your tomatoes releases more Lycopene. That means tomato-based sauces, including ketchup and barbecue sauce, are good for you, as long as you consider the effects of other ingredients, including sugar, salt, artificial additives and oil. Generally, darker ketchups have been demonstrated to contain more Lycopene than lighter ones. Low-sodium canned tomatoes are a healthy substitute for fresh ones. Concentrated tomato products such as sauces and pastes provide an extra helping of nutrients. Fresh tomatoes can be made into sauces, combined with other vegetables, grilled or roasted.

Organic tomatoes contain almost twice as much Lycopene as non-organic ones. One theory suggests that many commercial tomatoes are a crop that has been specifically bred to mature quickly, achieve even size, travel well without damage and stay on the shelf for long periods of time. Plants are living organisms that must obtain essential nutrients through absorption from the soil or synthesize them from sunlight. If the crop is not in the field long enough, there isn't time for the nutrient acquisition to take place.

Tomato skins supply additional Lycopene, so if you have a choice, include them when serving raw or cooking.

When buying tomatoes, look for firmness. Pick tomatoes with an intense colour, especially if you want to eat them the same day. Choose tomatoes with a little green if you will not use them for several days. They will continue to ripen over time.

If you have fresh summer tomatoes, sometimes the simplest methods of preparation taste the best. Use them raw or cooked, use them often in salsas or salads, or serve sliced, roasted or grilled. Here are a few recipe ideas that you can share with your family or a group of girls on a health kick!!

Elegant Caprese Platter

2 or 3 pounds fully ripe medium tomatoes
1/2 pound fresh Mozzarella cheese
Large bunch fresh basil leaves, washed and stemmed
Extra virgin olive oil
Coarse sea salt
Fresh ground black pepper, if desired

Slice tomatoes about 1/2 inch thick, slice fresh Mozzarella thinly. On a large platter, overlap the tomato slices and cheese. Add whole fresh basil leaves atop each pair. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and sprinkle with coarse sea salt. Add freshly ground pepper if desired.

Slow Roast Cherry Tomato Bruschetta

An exotic snack or appetiser that looks as good as it tastes. This will become a staple lunch time favourite in your house. Easy and quick to make and the kids will absolutely love to do this by themselves once shown how!! To create that mock Pizza taste, you can sprinkle a bit of shredded mozzarella or cheddar on top and then stick the baguette slices under the grill for a minute or two until the cheese has melted and calls out to the younger taste buds!!

1 lb cherry tomatoes
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
3 cloves minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1/4 cup sliced fresh basil
1 tablespoon red-wine vinegar
14 slices baguette (preferably whole-wheat), toasted
Olives or sliced fresh basil for garnish



1. Preheat oven to 325°F.
2. Toss tomatoes with oil, garlic, salt and pepper. Place on a baking sheet and roast until broken approx 45 to 55 minutes.
3. Combine the roasted tomatoes with basil and vinegar.
4. Top baguette slices with the roasted tomato mixture.
5. Garnish with olives or sliced fresh basil.

Shrimp salad - stuffed tomatoes

Hollowed-out tomatoes were the secret to elegant lunches in the '50s - and they deserve a comeback today. Look for bright red, aromatic tomatoes without any mushy spots or discolorations. Kids will love to help you scoop out the flesh from these tomatoes.

1 pound peeled cooked shrimp
1 stalk celery, finely diced
1/4 cup minced fresh basil
10 pitted olives
1 medium shallot, minced
2 tablespoons reduced-fat mayonnaise
1 tablespoon white-wine vinegar
Pinch of freshly ground pepper
4 large ripe cored tomatoes



1. Combine shrimp, celery, basil, olives, shallot, mayonnaise, vinegar and pepper in a medium bowl. Stir to combine.
2. Carefully hollow out the inside of each tomato using a melon baller, or small spoon; reserve the scooped tomato for another use.
3. To serve, fill each tomato with a generous 1/2 cup of the shrimp salad
4. Serve on a bed of multi-coloured lettuce

Save the scooped-out tomato insides to use in fresh tomato soup or pasta sauce. Store in the refrigerator for up to 3 days or in the freezer for up to 6 months.

Prepare and serve any of these elegant and healthy dishes and have your guests polish off their plates and keep coming back for more!!

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