



Fresh Ways to Use Tomatoes

Tomatoes are peaking right now, and we do them an injustice by just tossing them into salads. Read on for everything you've ever wanted to know about tomatoes, and ways to make them really shine. Tomatoes are native to the Andean region of South America, but they were domesticated in Mexico, where a range of colors and sizes were first selected and grown. Spanish colonization brought them to Europe in the mid-1500s, where Italians named them pomodoro, "golden apple," since the first ones to arrive were likely yellow. The French went further and called them "love apples." None of that affection made it to North America right away, because colonists clung to a European suspicion that tomatoes were poisonous. Thomas Jefferson grew them at Monticello in 1781, decades ahead of most of his countrymen, and tomatoes weren't widely cultivated in the US until the 1830s.

Fun fact: In 1893, a produce importer argued tomatoes should be taxed as a fruit, not a vegetable, to dodge a tariff. The dispute was brought to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the tax collector. Botany says fruit, but the tomato is eaten as a vegetable, and that's what counts.

Know Your Tomato

- **Beefsteak:** large, meaty, built for slicing onto a sandwich or a burger.
- **Heirloom:** open-pollinated varieties passed down for generations, prized for flavor and color over shelf life. Cherokee Purple and Brandywine are two you'll see often.
- **Roma/plum:** dense, low-water, few seeds. Best for sauce and paste.
- **San Marzano:** a specific Italian plum variety, considered the gold standard for marinara and widely available canned..
- **Cherry and grape:** small, sweet, built for roasting whole or eating raw by the handful.
- **Green tomatoes:** unripe, firm, tart. Most often fried southern-style with cornmeal, but also good pickled.

Tomatoes are a warm-season crop that needs consistent heat to fruit well, which is why the US growing season runs roughly late spring through early fall. Florida and California grow the bulk of the country's fresh-market supply between them. Peak season means peak supply, and peak supply means the tomatoes at the store or the farmers market are both tastier and cheaper than they'll be in January. Tomatoes are already the second most consumed vegetable in the US, behind only potatoes. They're also the most popular vegetable to grow at home: 86% of people with a food garden grow tomatoes!

Tomatoes are good for you

One medium tomato contains about 35 calories and is a good source of vitamin C potassium, and the B-vitamin folate. Tomatoes are one of the richest sources of lycopene, the carotenoid responsible for their red color and linked to lower rates of certain cancers (prostate cancer in particular) and cardiovascular disease. Since lycopene is fat soluble and locked inside the tomato's cell walls when raw, cooking the tomato and adding a bit of fat significantly increases how much of it your body absorbs.

16 Ways to enjoy tomatoes

- Halve cherry tomatoes, toss with olive oil and salt, and roast at 400°F for 20 minutes until blistered and jammy. Pile onto toast, stir into pasta, or spoon over burrata or grilled tofu.
- Broil halved tomatoes topped with parmesan or nutritional yeast and breadcrumbs for 5 minutes, until golden. Serve as a side to anything off the grill.
- Simmer chopped tomatoes with coconut milk, curry powder, and garlic until slightly thickened, then stir in chickpeas or lentils and simmer until warmed through for a classic Indian dish right at home. Serve over rice with cilantro.
- Spread a thin layer of ricotta (dairy or plant-based) over puff pastry, layer with sliced tomatoes and torn basil, and bake at 400°F for 25 minutes until the crust puffs and browns. Cut into squares for a party or wedges for lunch with a green salad.
- Simmer cherry tomatoes with cannellini beans, garlic, and olive oil until the tomatoes collapse into a loose sauce. Serve over toasted bread or alongside grilled fish or tofu.
- Blend roasted tomatoes with white beans and garlic into a smoky dip. Serve with pita chips or raw vegetables.
- Toss stale bread cubes with tomatoes, cucumber, red onion, and a sharp vinaigrette for a panzanella. Let it sit for 10 minutes before serving so the bread soaks up the juices.
- Hollow out beefsteak tomatoes, stuff with seasoned rice or breadcrumbs and herbs, and bake at 375°F for 30 minutes.
- Skewer cherry tomatoes and torn burrata or marinated tofu with basil leaves, then drizzle with olive oil and balsamic. Serve as a restaurant-worthy appetizer.
- Slice tomatoes and watermelon, scatter with feta (dairy or plant-based) and mint, and finish with olive oil and flaky salt. Serve as a starter on a hot day.
- Slow-cook halved tomatoes in olive oil with garlic and herbs at 275°F for 90 minutes, until soft and lightly caramelized, for a jarred confit. Spoon over crostini or stir into pasta.
- Stir chopped tomatoes into risotto during the last 10 minutes of cooking, so they break down into the rice. Finish with parmesan or nutritional yeast and basil.
- Simmer tomatoes with garlic and stale bread until it breaks down into a thick, rustic soup, pappa al pomodoro. Serve warm with a drizzle of olive oil.
- Cook down tomatoes with onion, garlic, and berbere spice blend until deep red, then stir in red lentils and simmer until tender. This is Ethiopian-style misir wot, which is a real treat served over injera or rice.
- Simmer tomatoes with garlic, ginger, and a mix of warm spices like cumin and coriander, then stir into rice and simmer until the rice absorbs the color and flavor.
- Simmer tomatoes with garlic, ginger, and a bit of curry powder, then blend with coconut milk until smooth and velvety. Serve as a soup with crusty bread or naan.

Classic Marinara



This is a super basic and simple marinara you can make with any combination of fresh tomatoes you have on hand.

Ingredients:

- 3 lbs ripe tomatoes, any variety
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1/2 tsp salt, more to taste
- Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)
- A few fresh basil leaves

Instructions:

1. Score an X into the bottom of each tomato, then blanch in boiling water for 30 seconds and transfer to an ice bath. The skins will slip right off. Core the tomatoes and chop roughly, saving any juice.
2. For cherry or grape tomatoes, skip blanching and peeling, just halve or quarter them and add straight to the pot, since the skins soften into the sauce as it simmers.
3. Warm the olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute, until fragrant but not browned.
4. Add the tomatoes and their juice, salt, and red pepper flakes. Simmer uncovered for 35 to 45 minutes, stirring occasionally and mashing the tomatoes as they soften, until thickened. Juicier varieties like beefsteak may need closer to 45 minutes, while dense Romas or San Marzanos will cook faster, and cherry tomatoes will cook faster still since they're already broken down.
5. Stir in torn basil at the end.