



TOMATOES

Description

Tomatoes are members of the night shade family, related to potatoes, bell peppers and eggplant. They can be red, pink, orange, yellow, round to oblong and from 1 inch to 6 inches in diameter. The flavor ranges from sweet to bland to tart, depending on the variety. The most widely grown commercial tomato tends to be in the 5-6 cm diameter range. Tomatoes grown for canning are often elongated and known as plum tomatoes.

Uses

Unripe tomatoes can be ripened in a paper bag at room temperature. Tomatoes should be stored at room temperature. Ripe tomatoes can be kept up to 2 days. The most popular way to eat fresh tomatoes is to slice them raw and eat them in salads or sandwiches. Tomatoes can be sold as a beverage and unripe green tomatoes can be used to make salsa, be breaded and fried, or pickled.

Origin

Although the tomato is botanically a fruit it is prepared and consumed as a vegetable. Because of a tariff dispute, the U.S. Supreme Court officially declared it a vegetable in 1893. The wild form of the plant still flourishes in Mexico and Central and South America and is similar to the domestic cherry tomato. Tomatoes were not widely accepted as a food until the 19th century, because most plants of the night-shade family were known to be poisonous. The tomato was cooked for hours to neutralize the toxins they were thought to contain. Today, tomatoes are one of the most popular vegetables in the United States.

Nutrient Content

The great new about tomatoes is that not only does it taste delicious, it's nutritious. One medium tomato supplies more than 40% of the daily allowance of vitamin C and 20% of vitamin A plus potassium --all with only 35 calories.

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Varieties

Tomatoes are available in three basic types; small, round cherry tomatoes; plump, oblong plum or Roma tomatoes; and round or globe-shaped slicing tomatoes, probably the sweetest and juiciest type. Within each type are numerous varieties, totaling about 4,000. To increase shelf life tomatoes are usually picked when they are at the "mature green" stage and growers have developed thicker-skinned, hardy varieties to withstand long-distance shipping

Recipe

Tomato Cheese Bruschetta

Italian or French bread, sliced 1/2 inch thick
Extra virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, halved
Salt and pepper to taste
2 large tomatoes finely chopped
2 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
2 Tablespoons snipped fresh basil or Italian parsley
Arrange bread slices on baking sheet. Broil until lightly browned. Turn and broil other side until lightly browned. Brush tops with olive oil. Rub with garlic. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, to taste. Top with chopped tomato on each toasted bread slice. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese. Broil 1 to 2 minutes or just until heated. Remove from oven and sprinkle with fresh basil or Italian parsley. Serve Immediately. Yield: 4 to 8 servings

Availability

Fresh-market tomatoes are produced in Pennsylvania from the first of June to the end of October. Tomatoes are available all year, but the quality of those grown locally and vine ripened in summer is unsurpassed. And the price, of course, is about a quarter of what it may be for top tomatoes out of season.