

Tomatoes, tomatoes everywhere! Are your home grown tomatoes ready? Last summer I had no luck with growing tomatoes, but this year the vines are loaded. They have gotten plenty of water!

Maybe you have experienced this too-- I really wasn't very fond of tomatoes, but my taste for them has changed over the years. It's a good thing too, because tomatoes have many health benefits.

Tomatoes are a good source of vitamins A, C and E. Vitamin A is essential for your eyes, helps your skin and helps you fight infection and disease. Vitamin C strengthens your blood vessels, helps your immune system work properly, helps you have healthy teeth and gums, and helps your body heal and absorb iron. Vitamin E which helps protect cell membranes.

Tomatoes also contain large amount of lycopene, a powerful antioxidant that may protect cells from damage. The good news about tomatoes they are low in calories. One cup of tomatoes is only 32 calories.

Tomatoes can be picked when they are slightly pink or a tinge of red appears. Don't set your tomatoes in the window sill so they get sunlight. You might think this ripens them sooner, but it doesn't. You want to keep them out of the sunlight because it will over heat them and they will not ripen evenly. Its best to keep them at room temperature above 55 degrees, arrange them stem side up to prevent bruising.

If you want to ripen tomatoes fairly soon, put them in a paper bag with an apple or banana. The ethylene gas that is giving off by the fruit will hasten the ripening process. For optimum flavor, don't store tomatoes in the refrigerator. Cold damages them and destroy their ripening potential. You may have purchased a refrigerated tomato at the store. It looked great but you get it home, slice into the tomato you find out is mealy and has very little taste.

When tomatoes are red and yield to the touch they will keep for a day or two at room temperature. If you need to keep them longer then this is the time to refrigerate them. Find the warmest spot in your refrigerator, usually the butter compartment. For full flavor after you take the tomatoes out of the refrigerator let them come back to room temperature before you serve them. If you have too many to refrigerate you can freeze them or make tomato sauce and freeze it.

With all the health benefits of tomatoes don't you think you should get more into your diet? Here are a few suggestions for getting more tomatoes into your eating plan: Drink tomato juice, add a slice of tomatoes to your sandwich and wraps, have a bowl of tomato soup for lunch, add tomatoes to a garden salad, or make tomato salsa.

Here are a few things I do with tomatoes for my family. One of my daughter's would not touch tomatoes. She really likes both of these recipes.

Yummy Tomatoes

1 to 2 tomatoes  
Mozzarella Cheese  
Oregano (fresh or dried)  
Basil

Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350°. Wash and slice tomatoes thin cut, place in a 9 x 11 pan. Sprinkle tomatoes with salt, pepper, basil, oregano. Cover with mozzarella cheese. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes. I like to bake until cheese is turning light brown. Enjoy!

Tomato salsa

6 to 8 fresh tomatoes

One small red onion

One to two fresh jalapeno peppers

Cilantro, handful

Salt and pepper to taste

Dice tomatoes, cut onion and pepper into small pieces, salt and pepper to taste, add one handful of cilantro. Mix well refrigerate for at least one hour before eating. This is great for dipping chips or topping tacos.