

Tomato

Growing & Harvesting

Grow. Tomatoes are usually started from transplants. When starting indoors, consider a grow light as they require a lot of direct sunlight and temperatures in the 75-90°F range to germinate. Plant transplants 24-30 inches apart. Tomatoes do best when planted deeply. Even moisture is important to prevent cracking of fruit or blossom end rot, a common problem with tomatoes. Stake early and avoid excessive nitrogen. Add high phosphorous (5-10-5) fertilizer when fruits are one inch in diameter. For more growing information, look for the MontGuide, Growing Tomatoes in Montana at www.msuetension.org or call your Extension office.

Harvest. For optimum flavor, tomatoes should be allowed to ripen fully on the vine. Tomatoes will change color when ripe.



Selection

Look for the reddest, ripest tomatoes, and watch for bruises and blemishes. Tomatoes should be soft, heavy, and firm. Smell is the best indicator of ripeness. Remember, size is not an indicator of quality.

Storage

Tomatoes should be stored in a cool, dry place. Do not store in a plastic bag. Store in a single layer, as stacking tomatoes may cause them to become mushy. If tomatoes need ripening, place them in a paper bag with a banana or an apple for a day or two—the gas from the fruit will help ripen them. Reminder: refrigerate and use within four days of slicing a tomato.

Nutrition Information

Most vegetables are rich in fiber and phytochemicals, but provide negligible amounts of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium and are gluten-free. Tomatoes are high in Vitamin A and C and are a good source of potassium, with 16 calories per half-cup serving.

Uses

Grill. Rinse and cut tomatoes in half, brush with olive oil, and place directly on a preheated (medium-high heat) grill. Cook about 6-8 minutes until soft, turning once.

Raw. Rinse, dry and eat on top of salads or in sandwiches. For a quick and easy sandwich, top slices of whole grain bread with sliced tomatoes, sprinkle with reduced-fat cheese, and broil on high for 3-5 minutes, or until cheese melts.

Roast. Place small or grape variety, or diced tomatoes in a plastic bag, drizzle with olive oil and desired seasoning. Shake until tomatoes are coated, then bake in an oven at 425°F until soft, about 5-8 minutes.

Season. To enhance flavor, use basil, celery seed, chili powder, cumin, dill weed, garlic, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, tarragon or thyme.

Preserve. For more information on preserving tomatoes, look for MontGuides: Drying Vegetables; Processing Fruit, Homecanning Pressures and Processing Times; Tomatoes and Mixtures in a Pressure Canner; Freezing Vegetables. Visit www.msuetension.org/nutrition and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension office.

Food Safety Tips

1. **Clean.** Wash hands and food contact surfaces before and after preparation.
2. **Chill.** Keep produce and food cool and chill promptly.
3. **Separate.** Keep produce and food separate from raw meats and eggs.
4. **Cook.** Cook food to a safe temperature.

Questions? Click on www.foodsafety.gov

Preparation: Step-by-Step



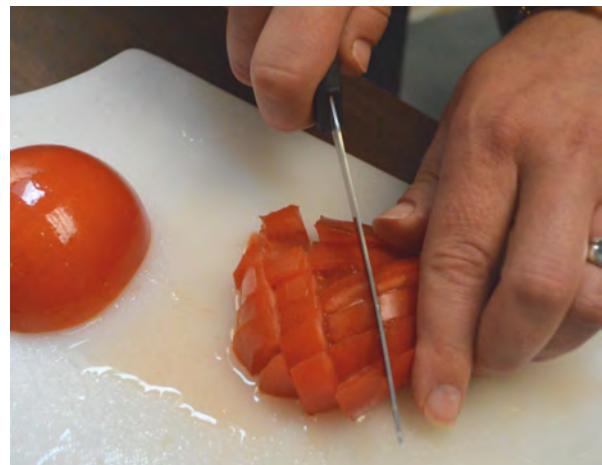
Wash hands. Thoroughly rinse tomato in cold water to remove any dirt.



Remove stem by slicing tomato in half with a sharp paring knife, then make a diagonal cut on both sides of the stem.



Hold one end of tomato and slice the other end with a sharp knife to desired thickness.



Cut slices again to dice to desired thickness.

For More Information:

Montana State University Extension: www.msuextension.org
MSU Extension Master Gardener: www.mtmastergardener.org
MSU Extension Food and Nutrition: www.msuextension.org/nutrition
MSU Extension Nutrition Education Programs: www.buyeatlivebetter.org

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Fruits & Veggies More Matters. (2012). Tomato: Nutrition, selection, storage. <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/tomato>
Spice Advice. (2013). Spice usage tips. <http://www.spiceadvice.com/news/a/usage/chart.html>
University of Wisconsin Extension. (2013). It's tomato time. <http://clark.uwex.edu/files/2010/10/Tomato.pdf>