

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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To-may-to, To-mah-to, Their season is almost here!

No matter how you call them, the tomato season is almost here. Are you ready for big round globes of juicy red deliciousness? It's hard to believe that when tomatoes were first taken to Europe from the Americas people thought they were poisonous! Then, when they discovered that no one was dying, they thought that they were aphrodisiacs. Young women in particular were told to avoid tomatoes. Were they trying to protect the women, or leave more tomatoes for the men? Who knows!

Are you so tired of blah, flat, little-flavor tomatoes that you've given up on them? Do give them another chance. Growers know their customers have been complaining about the lack of flavor in commercial tomatoes. So there are new varieties coming on the market that promise better flavor. Give some of them a try when you see them.

Tomatoes have so much good nutrition that they really are worth their weight. Besides their vitamin A, the lycopene that gives tomatoes their bright red color is also known to help protect our vision. Without vitamin A our eyes can not respond to light to send a vision message to our brains. Lack of vitamin A is a leading cause of blindness, including night blindness, in the world.

For the more elderly among us the lycopene, and probably some of the other antioxidants in tomatoes, are particularly useful in helping to protect us from or slowing the development of macular degeneration. This is a condition inside the eye that prevents the nerves from sending signals to the brain. It often starts out as just a fuzzy spot in our field of vision. Sometimes everything we see looks wavy or distorted.

There's no cure for it yet, and it is more common as we age. But those red pigments in tomatoes help prevent it. So have some more spaghetti sauce!

Yes, spaghetti sauce is fine. So are canned tomatoes if they're more affordable or more convenient. We actually absorb more vitamin A from cooked tomatoes than we do from raw ones. As long as the cooked tomatoes are still bright red, not turned brown from over-cooking, the lycopene will still be there too. The only vitamin we lose when we cook tomatoes is vitamin C. It's a wimp and breaks down when it gets hot. But the other nutrients, including fiber and the minerals are all still there.

One reason we add tomatoes to so many foods, from omelets to pasta, soups to gravy, is the natural MSG they contain. Tomatoes have some of the highest natural concentrations of MSG from Mother Nature. MSG is made from glutamine, an amino acid that's part of protein. For some reason, this particular form of the amino acid really improves the flavor of many foods. Meat, fish and poultry especially taste better with MSG, but vegetable dishes are improved as well. So adding tomatoes or tomato sauce to just about anything can perk it up.

When you buy fresh red ripe tomatoes look for fruits that have a smooth skin with no cracks, bruises or soft spots. They should feel firm and fat. If you see mold spots on one, don't choose it! Even if you cut out the moldy spot, there might be toxins in the rest of the tomato.

Red ripe tomatoes keep their best flavor at room temperature, but they can be stored in the refrigerator if necessary. They should keep for about a week. Use them before they get soft and watery. You can freeze tomatoes and use for cooking later.

If you go for green tomatoes you won't get the lycopene or the vitamin A. They

haven't developed yet when the tomato is still green. But there will probably be some vitamin C, and the fiber and minerals will be there. Here are directions for baking your sliced green tomatoes instead of frying them. You'll get the flavor but avoid all the fat.

Enjoy!

Baked Green Tomatoes

2 cups cornmeal

salt and pepper to taste

8 medium green tomatoes

chili powder if desired

Preheat oven to 325°F. Lightly grease a medium baking sheet or line with a sheet of parchment paper. Wash tomatoes, remove stem and pat dry. Slice into thin slices. In small, flat bowl combine cornmeal, salt, pepper and chili powder or other seasonings. Dip tomato slices into cornmeal, covering both sides and patting gently to stick cornmeal to slices. Arrange in single layer on baking sheet. Bake 45 minutes or until crisp and golden brown. Serves 4-6