

Tomatoes

Nothing defines the summer better than juicy vine-ripened British tomatoes. Although tomatoes are now available year-round, the truly wonderful qualities of British tomatoes are the best when they are in season from July through September.

Although tomatoes are closely associated with Italian cuisine, they are actually originally native to the western coastal region of South America, stretching from Ecuador to Peru and Chile.

And I'm sure you don't need me to point out to you that, botanically, tomatoes are actually a fruit.

There are many varieties from sweet cherry tomatoes to large beefsteak tomatoes but all share similar 'super food' qualities. Tomatoes are a rich source of lycopene, beta-carotene, folate, potassium, vitamin C, flavonoids, and vitamin E.

The processing of tomatoes may significantly affect the bioavailability of these nutrients. Homogenization, heat treatment, and the incorporation of oil in processed tomato products (e.g., canned tomatoes, ketchup, passata, tomato puree, red pesto) leads to increased lycopene bioavailability, while some of the same processes cause significant loss of other nutrients.

Countless studies have shown that the lycopene in tomatoes helps to fight against pancreatic, prostate and colon cancers as well as heart disease.

The vitamin C in tomatoes acts as an antioxidant, mopping up damaging free radicals. Vitamin C also plays an important part in healing bones and wounds.

Tomatoes are fantastically versatile and can be so much more than just a salad vegetable.

- Simmer canned tomatoes with a little olive oil, chopped onion and garlic for a quick and easy pasta sauce.
- Roughly chop raw tomatoes, spring onions, a little red chilli add a dash of lime juice for a refreshing salsa dip.
- Use tomato juice seasoned with a little celery salt and Worcestershire sauce for a refreshing drink.
- Try a variety of tomato-based pasta sauces and pastes. Stir them into pasta, risottos and vegetables for a tasty, low-fat meal.
- Finely chop raw tomatoes with garlic and use as a topping on toasted bread with a drizzle of olive oil for a light lunch or snack.
- Wizz together canned tomatoes, garlic, paprika, a few chilli flakes and fresh basil in a blender and heat for a deliciously simple tomato soup.