

Whatever the color, whatever the kind, tomatoes enchant us. By Joanne Weir

all about tomatoes

(Left to right) Globe tomato, plum tomatoes, and pear tomatoes

PHOTOGRAPHY: BECKY LUGART-STAYNER/STYLING: LYDIA DEGARIS-PURSELL

OH, HOW AMERICA LOVES the tomato. The aroma of the vine, sweetness of the flesh, and juicy acidity spur between 25 and 40 million of us to grow tomatoes in gardens, containers, and window boxes each year. There are few greater pleasures than a just-picked ripe, red tomato still warm from the summer sun, or a basket of juicy heirloom tomatoes from your farmers' market.

More than any other fruit or vegetable, the tomato has changed the face of modern cuisine. Whether you toss chopped tomatoes into a beef stew, slide a few slices into a BLT, or layer them with their soul mate, basil, tomatoes have become ubiquitous.

But even the reddest, plumpest specimens can disappoint when it comes to flavor and juiciness. Finding the best choice, knowing its flavor secrets, and understanding the best way to preserve that flavor will deepen your enthusiasm for one of summer's great tastes.

How do you pick a good tomato?

Not by looks. Some of the best-tasting tomatoes happen to be some of the homeliest. And picture-perfect tomatoes can be flavorless. Picking a good tomato starts at home, or in your neighborhood. Home-grown tomatoes can't be beat. But when you buy tomatoes, smell them—a good tomato should smell like a tomato, especially at the stem end.

How do you make a lackluster tomato taste better?

Even the best tomatoes taste a little better with a sprinkle of salt, which accentuates the balance of sweetness and acidity. If you have a tomato that's flavorless beyond a restorative touch of salt, drizzle a few drops of balsamic vinegar or honey over it to bring out both the sweetness and acidity. Grilling, roasting, and stewing can also give a bland tomato life: When you apply heat, the tomato's moisture evaporates, concentrating its flavor.

What makes a tomato mealy? How can you tell if a tomato is mealy before slicing into it?

Tomatoes are greatly affected by temperature, even during the growing process. They originally came

cooking class

from the warm western coast of South America and don't respond well to temperatures below 50 degrees. Cool temperatures can change a tomato's composition, converting its natural sugar to starch and resulting in a tasteless, mealy tomato. For this reason, never refrigerate a tomato. The cold environment causes the water in the tomato to expand, ruining the texture. If a tomato feels soft, there's a chance it will be mealy, but, unfortunately, it isn't always possible to tell before slicing.

What is the best way to ripen and store tomatoes?

Place them at room temperature in a single layer, shoulder-side up, and out of direct sunlight. To store ripe tomatoes for any extended period of time, keep them between 55 and 65 degrees.

My grocer sells little net bags of tomatoes still attached to a vine. Are these really worth their high price?

Those tomatoes were not necessarily ripe when picked, so they often lack flavor. They're generally not worth the extra expense.

When should you use canned tomatoes?

Opt for canned tomatoes when you want their juice, as in the Stewed Chicken with Okra and Tomatoes (page 146). Otherwise, let the season be your guide and use fresh tomatoes whenever possible.

What are the flavor differences among red, yellow, orange, green, and purple tomatoes?

Generally speaking, yellow and orange tomatoes tend to be less acidic than red and are therefore sweeter. These tomatoes have a fruity, almost tropical flavor as a result of their low acidity. Because their sugars aren't fully developed, green tomatoes have a tart, citrusy tang. Purple and blackish varieties have a complex flavor similar to red wine.



Open-Faced Bacon, Lettuce, and Fried Green Tomato Sandwiches ▲

Double-breading the tomato slices gives them a crunchy coating. Soaking the tomatoes in hot water draws out their moisture, which helps keep them crisp when cooked. On their own, the fried green tomatoes in this recipe are a classic Southern side dish.

2 medium green tomatoes, cut into 12 (¼-inch-thick) slices (about 1 pound)	2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
2 tablespoons fat-free milk	5 tablespoons light mayonnaise
4 large egg whites, lightly beaten	1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1½ cups yellow cornmeal	¼ teaspoon hot sauce
¾ teaspoon salt	6 (1½-ounce) slices white bread, toasted
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper	6 Bibb lettuce leaves
	9 bacon slices, cooked and cut in half
	2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

1. Place tomato slices in a large bowl; cover with hot water. Let stand 15 minutes. Drain and pat dry with paper towels. Combine milk and egg whites, stirring with a whisk. Combine cornmeal, salt, and pepper in a shallow dish, stirring with a whisk. Dip each tomato slice in milk mixture; dredge in cornmeal mixture. Return tomato slices, one at a time, to milk mixture; dredge in cornmeal mixture.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add half of tomato slices; cook 4 minutes on each side or until crisp and golden. Repeat procedure with remaining oil and tomato slices.
3. Combine mayonnaise, juice, and hot sauce, stirring with a whisk. Spread about 1 tablespoon mayonnaise mixture onto each bread slice; top with 1 lettuce leaf, 3 bacon pieces, and 2 tomato slices. Sprinkle each sandwich with 1 teaspoon chives. Serve immediately. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 sandwich).

CALORIES 386 (30% from fat); FAT 12.8g (sat 2.8g, mono 4.5g, poly 2.6g); PROTEIN 12.2g; CARB 56.2g; FIBER 3.9g; CHOL 16mg; IRON 2.2mg; SODIUM 834mg; CALC 44mg

Beefsteak: Known as a slicing tomato, this large, ribbed, pumpkin-shaped type is common at farmers' markets. Because its characteristic flavor balances sweetness and acidity, it's great for eating raw. It also maintains its shape and flavor when cooked.

Globe: This is the kind you usually find in grocery stores. A medium-sized, firm, juicy tomato similar to the beefsteak, it also has a good balance of sweetness and acidity. It's best raw, so reserve globe tomatoes for salads, cold sandwiches, or eating over the kitchen sink.

Plum: Also called Roma or Italian, this egg-shaped red or yellow tomato is not as sweet or acidic as the beefsteak and globe varieties. Plum tomatoes have lower water content and fewer seeds, so they are especially good for cooking and canning. Plum are the best year-round supermarket tomatoes.

Heirloom: These tomatoes are old or original tomato varieties that fell out of production and have been reintroduced in recent years. They are open-pollinated and are not genetically altered to suit modern commercial production. Look for heirloom tomatoes at farmers' markets, or grow your own. Flavors vary widely among the hundreds of types, and there are myriad colors, shapes, and sizes. Among the best-loved varieties: mortgage lifter, brandywine, Arkansas traveler, Cherokee, and zebra.

Green tomatoes: Picked before ripe, they have a sharp, tart taste and firm flesh, which makes them excellent for frying, broiling, and stewing. You don't want to eat them raw, but cooking green tomatoes softens the flesh and tempers the acidity.

Cherry: This term refers to a family of tomatoes, which includes several types and colors, all of which are about an inch in diameter and similar in flavor. The defining difference among the members of this family is their shape. They include the following three varieties:


Cherry also refers specifically to a small round type. Available in red, orange, green, or yellow, they taste similar to beefsteak and globe tomatoes but have a more pronounced sweetness. They're often good during winter months. Try them in salads or quick sautés. Use as a garnish, or eat them out of hand. Cut them in half so they'll be easier to eat.

Grape tomatoes have a more elliptical shape, similar to a grape, and are almost always red. They have a more intense sweetness than the cherry kind, balanced by a subtle acidity. For the best flavor, look for grape tomatoes that are no larger than an inch in diameter. If they're larger, they'll have a higher water content and a diluted taste.

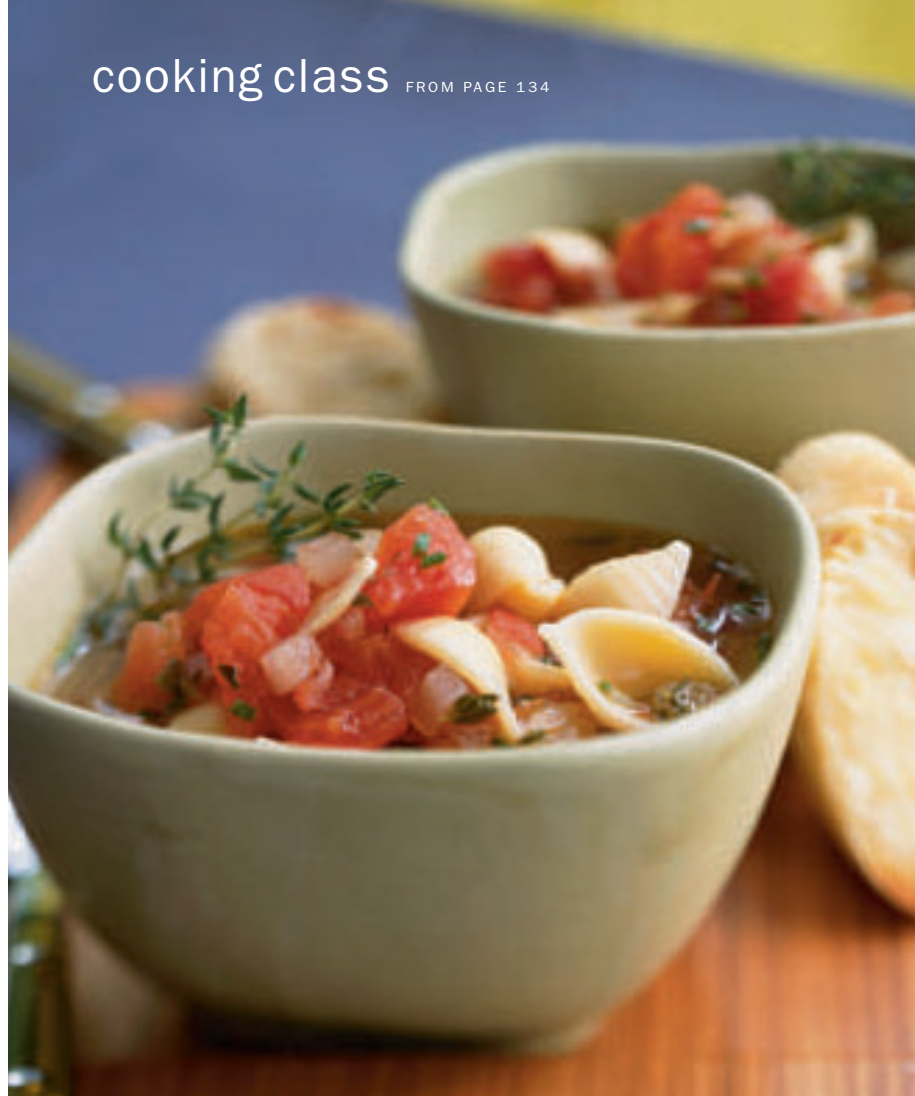
Pear tomatoes are shaped like small pears or teardrops. They are best eaten raw, but you can cook them briefly to finish a sauce or toss with pasta. Pear tomatoes are a bit smaller than cherry and have a flavor similar to grape tomatoes. They're available in yellow, red, and orange.

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tomato varieties



(From left) orange globe, Mr. Strihey heirloom, green globe, green sausage heirloom (top), beefsteak, Cherokee purple heirloom, and cuostralee heirloom



◀ Tomato Garlic Soup with Parmesan Croutons

Peel the tomatoes for this delicate soup, since the skins can become tough and chewy. Serve with a Caesar salad and a crisp white wine for a light meal.

- 4 large tomatoes, cored (about 2½ pounds)
- 2 quarts water
- 2 quarts ice water
- 1¼ cups uncooked seashell pasta
- 4 teaspoons olive oil, divided
- ¾ cup finely chopped red onion
- 8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 cup water
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh oregano
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
- 2 (14-ounce) cans fat-free, less-sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 8 (½-ounce) slices diagonally cut French bread baguette (about 1 inch thick)
- ½ cup (2 ounces) grated fresh Parmesan cheese
- Fresh thyme sprigs (optional)

1. Score bottom of each tomato with an “X.” Bring 2 quarts water to a boil in a Dutch oven. Add tomatoes; cook 30 seconds. Remove tomatoes with a slotted spoon; plunge tomatoes into ice water. Drain and peel. Cut each tomato in half crosswise.

Push seeds out of tomato halves using the tip of a knife; discard seeds. Chop tomatoes.

2. Cook pasta according to package directions, omitting salt and fat; drain. Toss pasta with 1 teaspoon oil. Cool completely.

3. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add onion; cook 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add garlic; cook 3 minutes or until onion is tender, stirring frequently. Stir in tomatoes, 1 cup water, parsley, chives, oregano, thyme, and broth; bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add pasta, vinegar, and pepper; cook 1 minute or until thoroughly heated.

4. Preheat broiler.

5. Place bread slices on a baking sheet, and top each slice with 1 tablespoon cheese. Broil 1½ minutes or until lightly browned. Serve with soup. Garnish with thyme sprigs, if desired. Yield: 4 servings (serving size: 1½ cups soup and 2 croutons).

CALORIES 335 (27% from fat); FAT 9.9g (sat 3g, mono 3.8g, poly 1g); PROTEIN 15.3g; CARB 46.6g; FIBER 4.1g; CHOL 11mg; IRON 2.7mg; SODIUM 695mg; CALC 227mg

WINE NOTE Although it’s a bit counterintuitive, tomatoes taste best paired with wines that mirror their high-acid profile. Acidity gives wine a kind of freshness, brightness, and vivacity—just the ticket for tangy tomato dishes. Italians often drink Chianti or Barbera with tomato sauce–based dishes; either would be a good choice with this soup. If you prefer white wines, try Pinot Grigio from Italy; Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, California, or Washington State; or, for a twist, Albarino from Spain. —Karen MacNeil

In general, when is it necessary to peel tomatoes?

Since peeling tomatoes is time-consuming, I avoid the process whenever possible. For most salsas, salads, and sandwiches, or when eating out of hand, the skin holds the tomato together, so peeling is unnecessary. For more delicate soups and sauces, like our Tomato Garlic Soup with Parmesan Croutons, the peel can be a nuisance.

To peel, use a small paring knife to score the bottom of each tomato with an “X,” cutting just through the skin but not into the flesh. Place the tomatoes in a pot of boiling water for 30 seconds. Remove them with a slotted spoon; quickly plunge the tomatoes into a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Once they’ve cooled, you can easily peel away the skins from the tomatoes.



cover recipe

◀ Rustic Tomato-Basil Tart

You can use all red tomatoes if you can't find yellow.

- 1½ pounds medium yellow tomatoes, cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1½ pounds medium red tomatoes, cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1½ teaspoons salt, divided
 - 1 cup fresh corn kernels (about 2 ears)
 - 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
 - 3 tablespoons fat-free sour cream
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup yellow cornmeal
- ¼ cup chilled butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 tablespoon yellow cornmeal
- ½ cup thinly sliced fresh basil, divided
- ⅓ cup (1½ ounces) shredded fontina cheese
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper

1. Arrange tomato slices in a single layer on several layers of paper towels; sprinkle with ½ teaspoon salt. Let stand 20 minutes; blot dry with paper towels.
2. Preheat oven to 400°.
3. Place corn, juice, and sour cream in a food processor or blender; process until smooth. Combine 1½ cups flour, ¼ cup cornmeal, and ½ teaspoon salt in a large bowl; stir with a whisk. Cut in butter with a pastry blender or 2 knives until mixture resembles coarse meal. Add corn mixture; stir until a soft dough forms. Knead gently 3 or 4 times.
4. Slightly overlap 2 (16-inch) sheets of plastic wrap on a slightly damp surface. Place dough on plastic wrap; press into a 6-inch circle. Cover with 2 additional (16-inch) sheets of overlapping plastic wrap. Roll dough, still covered, into a 14-inch circle; place on a large baking sheet in freezer 10 minutes or until plastic wrap can be easily removed. Line baking sheet with parchment paper; sprinkle paper with 1 tablespoon cornmeal. Remove 2 sheets of plastic wrap from dough. Place dough, plastic wrap side up, on baking sheet. Remove top sheets of plastic wrap.
5. Combine ¼ cup basil, cheese, and oregano. Combine 2 tablespoons flour and ½ teaspoon salt. Arrange cheese mixture on dough, leaving a 1½-inch border. Using a sifter or sieve, sift 1 tablespoon flour mixture over cheese mixture. Arrange half of tomatoes over cheese mixture. Sift remaining flour mixture over tomatoes; top with remaining tomatoes. Fold edges of dough toward center; press to seal (dough will only partially cover tomatoes). Bake at 400° for 35 minutes or until crust is brown; let stand 10 minutes. Sprinkle with ¼ cup basil and pepper. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 wedge).



1. Pureed corn makes an especially tender crust but also makes the dough a bit sticky. Flour your hands to make kneading easier.



2. A layer of fontina cheese and a dusting of flour keep the juicy tomatoes from making the crust soggy. A second dusting between layers of tomatoes helps, too.

Can't get enough? Find a basketful of fresh tomato recipes at CookingLight.com.

CALORIES 320 (32% from fat); FAT 11.5g (sat 6.4g, mono 3.1g, poly 1.1g); PROTEIN 9.2g; CARB 48g; FIBER 4.7g; CHOL 29mg; IRON 3.1mg; SODIUM 753mg; CALC 80mg

cooking class

Piadini with Cherry Tomatoes and Smoked Mozzarella ▶

For these sandwiches, you can use any small sweet tomatoes, such as cherry, grape, or pear. In a pinch, you can substitute store-bought flatbread for the sandwich crust. If you do, heat the bread and melt the cheese before filling the sandwiches so they will stay together.

CRUST:

- 2¼ cups bread flour, divided
- 1 package dry yeast (about 2¼ teaspoons)
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons warm water (100° to 110°), divided
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Cooking spray
- ¾ cup (3 ounces) shredded smoked mozzarella cheese, divided

FILLING:

- 1½ cups yellow cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1½ cups red cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ cup thinly sliced fresh basil
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon extravirgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 garlic clove, minced

1. To prepare crust, lightly spoon flour into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Dissolve yeast in ½ cup warm water in a large bowl; stir in ½ cup flour. Let stand 30 minutes. Add ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons warm water, 1½ cups flour, and salt, stirring to form a soft dough. Turn dough out onto a floured surface. Knead until smooth and elastic (about 8 minutes); add enough of remaining flour, 1 tablespoon at a time, to prevent dough from sticking to hands.

2. Place dough in a large bowl coated with cooking spray, turning to coat top. Cover and let rise in a warm place (85°), free from drafts, for 45 minutes or until doubled in size. (Gently press two fingers into dough. If indentation remains, dough has risen enough.) Punch dough down; cover and let rest 5 minutes.

3. Divide dough into 4 equal portions. Working with one portion at a time (cover remaining dough to prevent drying), roll each portion into a 7-inch circle on a lightly floured surface. Heat a large nonstick skillet coated with cooking spray over medium-high heat. Place dough circle in pan. Sprinkle with 3 tablespoons cheese. Cook 3 minutes or until cheese melts and dough is browned on bottom. Repeat procedure with remaining dough and cheese.

4. To prepare filling, combine tomatoes and remaining ingredients; toss gently to coat. Spoon ¾ cup tomato mixture into each crust, and fold over. Yield: 4 servings.

CALORIES 359 (21% from fat); FAT 8.5g (sat 3.6g, mono 2.6g, poly 0.5g); PROTEIN 14.9g; CARB 59g; FIBER 3.7g; CHOL 17mg; IRON 4.6mg; SODIUM 485mg; CALC 143mg



Yellow Tomatoes in Spiced Balsamic Vinaigrette

Yellow tomatoes have a low level of acidity, so they taste sweeter than most red tomatoes. Balsamic vinegar brings out the sweetness and adds a mild acidity. Use high-quality vinegar, since this recipe calls for quite a bit. Serve with steak, lamb, or salmon.

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| ½ cup thinly sliced green onions | 1 tablespoon ground cumin |
| 1 tablespoon minced seeded jalapeño pepper | 1 tablespoon freshly cracked black pepper |
| 8 medium yellow tomatoes, each cut into 6 wedges (about 2½ pounds) | 2 teaspoons paprika |
| 1½ tablespoons olive oil | 1 teaspoon ground turmeric |
| ¼ cup grated peeled fresh ginger | 4 garlic cloves, minced |
| | ¾ cup balsamic vinegar |
| | 3 tablespoons brown sugar |
| | 1 teaspoon kosher salt |

1. Combine first 3 ingredients in a large bowl.

2. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add ginger and next 5 ingredients (ginger through garlic); sauté 1 minute. Add vinegar, sugar, and salt to pan, stirring to combine. Bring to a boil; cook 1 minute, stirring frequently. Pour spice mixture over tomato mixture; toss gently to coat. Serve at room temperature. Yield: 10 servings (serving size: about ¾ cup).

CALORIES 80 (29% from fat); FAT 2.6g (sat 0.3g, mono 1.6g, poly 0.3g); PROTEIN 1.5g; CARB 14.1g; FIBER 2g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 1.2mg; SODIUM 254mg; CALC 29mg



Grilled Shrimp Skewers with Romesco ▲

Romesco is a classic Spanish sauce made with tomatoes, almonds, bell peppers, and garlic. It's traditionally served with grilled fish or chicken. Here, ancho chiles add a hint of smokiness. The sauce will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

ROMESCO:

- 8 plum tomatoes (about 1¼ pounds)
- 4 garlic cloves, unpeeled
- Cooking spray
- ½ cup water
- 5 tablespoons red wine vinegar, divided
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 2 ancho chiles
- ¼ cup whole blanched almonds
- 1 (1-ounce) slice French bread or other firm white bread, torn into small pieces
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- ¾ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

SHRIMP:

- 2¼ pounds jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. To prepare romesco, place tomatoes and garlic in a shallow roasting pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes or until tender. Cool. Peel and seed tomatoes; peel garlic.

3. Combine ½ cup water, 3 tablespoons vinegar, crushed red pepper, and chiles in a small saucepan; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Let stand, covered, 30 minutes. Drain. Discard stems and seeds from chiles.

4. Heat a small skillet coated with cooking spray over medium-high heat. Add almonds; cook 2 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring frequently. Remove from pan. Add bread to pan; cook 2 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring frequently. Place tomatoes, garlic, chiles, 2 tablespoons vinegar, almonds, bread, 2 tablespoons water, salt, oil, paprika, and pepper in a food processor; process mixture until smooth.

5. Prepare grill or broiler.

6. Thread the shrimp onto 12 (8-inch) skewers. Place skewers on grill rack or broiler pan coated with cooking spray, and cook 3 minutes on each side or until shrimp are done. Sprinkle shrimp with parsley, if desired. Serve with romesco. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 2 skewers and ¼ cup sauce).

CALORIES 277 (27% from fat); FAT 8.4g (sat 1.1g, mono 3.5g, poly 2.1g); PROTEIN 37.4g; CARB 13g; FIBER 2.1g; CHOL 259mg; IRON 5.2mg; SODIUM 684mg; CALC 119mg

In-season tomatoes
enliven everything
from simple sauces
to inventive
desserts.

Broiled Red Snapper with Sicilian Tomato Pesto

Plum tomatoes work best in this recipe; juicier tomatoes would thin the pesto. No need to seed or peel them. You can make the pesto ahead and keep it chilled. Stir in the tomatoes just before serving.

PESTO:

- 2 cups basil leaves
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted
- 2 tablespoons extravirgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 cup (1 ounce) grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- 1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 1/2 cups chopped plum tomato (about 3 medium)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

FISH:

- 6 (6-ounce) red snapper or other firm whitefish fillets
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Cooking spray

REMAINING INGREDIENT:

- 3 cups hot cooked orzo

1. To prepare pesto, combine first 4 ingredients in a food processor; process until smooth. Add cheese and red pepper; process until blended. Transfer mixture to a bowl. Add tomato, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and black pepper, stirring gently to combine.
2. Preheat broiler.
3. To prepare fish, sprinkle fish with 1/4 teaspoon salt. Arrange fish on a broiler pan coated with cooking spray, and broil 8 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Place 1/2 cup orzo on each of 6 plates, and top each serving with 1 fillet and 1/4 cup pesto. Yield: 6 servings.

CALORIES 437 (22% from fat); FAT 10.8g (sat 2.4g, mono 4.8g, poly 2g); PROTEIN 44.9g; CARB 38.9g; FIBER 3.1g; CHOL 67mg; IRON 2.9mg; SODIUM 497mg; CALC 156mg

Tomato-Spice Upside-Down Cake

Tart green tomatoes stand in for pineapple.

- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons grated peeled fresh ginger

Cooking spray

- 1 green tomato, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground mace
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 5 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup fat-free milk
- 2 large egg whites
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar

1. Place first 3 ingredients in a 9-inch round cake pan coated with cooking spray. Place pan over medium-low heat until sugar and butter melt, stirring frequently. Arrange tomato slices in a single layer over sugar mixture. Set aside.
2. Preheat oven to 350°.
3. Lightly spoon flour into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Combine flour, baking powder, and next 5 ingredients (baking powder through salt); stir with a whisk. Place granulated sugar and 5 tablespoons butter in a large bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until blended. Add molasses and egg yolks, 1 at a time, beat well after each addition. Beat in vanilla. Add flour mixture and milk alternately to sugar mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture.
4. Beat egg whites with a mixer at high speed until stiff peaks form. Fold egg whites into batter; pour batter into prepared pan. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan 15 minutes. Place a plate upside down on top of cake, and invert onto plate. Cool completely. Sprinkle with powdered sugar. Yield: 12 servings (serving size: 1 wedge).

CALORIES 233 (29% from fat); FAT 7.5g (sat 4.4g, mono 2.2g, poly 0.4g); PROTEIN 3.1g; CARB 39.4g; FIBER 0.5g; CHOL 53mg; IRON 2mg; SODIUM 184mg; CALC 102mg

cooking class

What's the best way to slice and seed tomatoes?

Anyone who's tried to cut a tomato with a dull knife knows the challenge; the skins are tougher than they look. A sharp serrated knife is the best tool for the job.



To seed a tomato, remove the core. Holding the tomato with the core side up, cut the tomato crosswise. Using the tip of a knife, remove and discard the seeds from each tomato half.

Stewed Chicken with Okra and Tomatoes

This hearty dish calls for canned tomatoes, which form the base for the dish's "gravy." Soaking the okra gives it a better texture.

- 4 cups water
- 3 cups okra pods, trimmed (about $\frac{3}{4}$ pound)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lemon juice
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons salt, divided
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 chicken breast halves (about $1\frac{3}{4}$ pounds), skinned
- 2 chicken leg quarters (about $1\frac{3}{4}$ pounds), skinned
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup thinly sliced red onion
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fat-free, less-sodium chicken broth
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dry white wine
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 whole cloves
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red wine vinegar

1. Combine first 3 ingredients and $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt in a large bowl. Let mixture stand 1 hour. Drain well, and pat dry with paper towels.

2. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Sprinkle the chicken with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt and pepper. Add chicken to pan, and cook 4 minutes on each side or until browned. Remove from pan. Add okra and onion to pan, and sauté 3 minutes or until lightly browned. Add broth and next 6 ingredients (broth through garlic), stirring to combine. Return chicken to pan, bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 25 minutes or until chicken is done. Remove chicken from pan, and keep warm. Bring tomato mixture to a boil; cook until reduced to 2 cups (about 5 minutes), stirring frequently. Discard cloves. Stir in parsley and vinegar. Serve with chicken. Yield: 4 servings (serving size: about 4 ounces chicken and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup tomato mixture).

CALORIES 311 (30% from fat); FAT 10.3g (sat 1.6g, mono 4g, poly 1.3g); PROTEIN 34.8g; CARB 18.9g; FIBER 4.8g; CHOL 64mg; IRON 2.9mg; SODIUM 681mg; CALC 148mg

Joanne Weir is the host of the PBS show Weir Cooking in the Wine Country and the author of You Say Tomato (Broadway, 1998).

