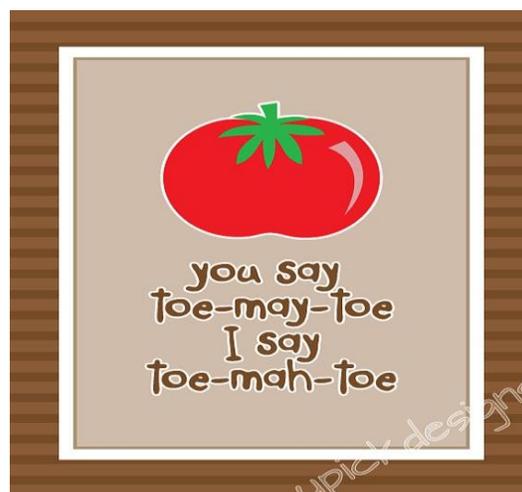


The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

For all you die hard tomato fans, these Juicy red veggies (technically fruit) are at peak season right now and come in so many varieties. One of the produce stars of summer eating is a sweet and perfectly vine ripened tomato. The tomato exists for one reason, to be eaten. Its bright red skin is there not to snub our advances but to be grabbed, and to be bitten into. There are no seeds to spit out, no tough rind, and, apart from a tiny green stem, no inedible pit or core. To the unintimidated, an artichoke is a bristly secret puzzle, but everyone can comprehend a tomato. If you have a garden you may already be enjoying the harvest of your tomato plants. If not, there are many reasons to stop by your local farmers market and pick some up.

No food straddles the line between fruit and vegetable more famously than the tomato. The confusion about whether or not a tomato is a "vegetable" or a "fruit" arises because of the contrast in usage between scientists and cooks. So, what makes a fruit a fruit, and a vegetable a vegetable. The big question to ask is, DOES IT HAVE SEEDS? If the answer is yes, then technically, botanically anyway, (although the US supreme court declared tomato's a vegetable in 1893), you have a FRUIT. It also makes cucumbers, squash, green beans and pumpkins all fruits as well. Along with the fruit from a plant or tree, we can often eat the leaves such as lettuce, celery, carrots, cauliflower and broccoli. Many of these other parts of the plant are typically referred to as VEGETABLES. And, just to add to the confusion, occasionally the term 'fruit' may be used to refer to a part of a plant which is not a fruit, but which is used in sweet cooking, rhubarb, for example. As far as cooking is concerned, some produce that are strictly fruits, such as tomatoes, peas or green beans, may be called 'vegetables' because they are used in savoury rather than sweet cooking. Now don't go looking for tomatoes next to the bananas in your grocery stores, fruits like tomatoes and green beans are usually alas, incorrectly referred to as "vegetables" in most grocery stores as well as cookbooks. The debate may have been settled once and for all by journalist Miles Kington, who stated, "Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad".

The tomato is a nutrient dense superfood. One medium tomato has 22 calories and provides more than 20 percent of your daily dose of both vitamins A, which supports immunity, and skin health. Vitamin K, which is good for your bones and vitamin C which helps to repair and regenerate tissues, protect against heart disease, protect against a variety of cancers and helps neutralize the effects of nitrites (preservatives found in some packaged foods). Tomatoes are good for your eyes as they contain the phytochemical antioxidant zeaxanthin. And that's not the only peeper-protective nutrient in tomatoes, they contain lutein and beta-carotene as well. According to research, those nutrients support vision and protect against eye conditions including cataracts and macular degeneration. When you think tomato's – think love. Love for your body as well as lycopene. Tomatoes are also rich in this wonder red pigment which acts as a neutralizing antioxidant that helps defend your body from damage causing free radicals. If vitamin A, K, C and lycopene are not a favourable enough reason to start indulging in these ruby reds, you need to know that tomatoes can also aid in gut health, by preventing jaundice, diarrhea, even constipation. Just be aware that the acidity from cooked tomatoes may trigger or worsen acid reflux and indigestion. Tomatoes also help regulate safe removal of toxins from the body. On top of all of that, this super fruit helps reduce risk for hypertension, type 2 diabetes, urinary tract infections and gallstones.



Tomato sauce, tomato paste, ketchup... Chances are that you eat plenty of cooked tomatoes. But if you don't, now would be a good time to start. If you're limiting yourself to fresh tomatoes, then you're only getting about 4% of the powerful vitamins that this veggie like fruit has to offer. Comparing the nutritional content of cooked tomatoes vs. raw, a study in the Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry unequivocally concluded that cooking increases the nutritional bioavailability of tomatoes. This may come as a surprise to the popular notion that fruit and vegetables in their raw form are inherently more nutritious than when cooked.

If tomatoes had a flaw it's that they are overachievers. Tomatoes are one of the most important ingredients in the kitchen. They can be dried, fried, grilled, stuffed, baked, roasted, juiced, added to soups, sauces, stews, salsa's, salads, sandwiches, served as a side dish, even on their own as a healthy snack. Along with garlic and olive oil they form the basis for so many recipes that it's hard to find a dish they are not included in. Add fresh tomatoes to omelets. Serve them sliced, drizzled with balsamic and garnish with basil, sea salt and cracked pepper. Dress fresh greens or steamed veggies with sundried tomato pesto, or drizzle over fish. You can toss pretty much anything in tomato sauce. Add some spicy salsa to scrambled eggs or taco salad, or spoon onto brown rice.

There are hundreds of tomato varieties. From marble-sized grape or cherry tomatoes, to juicy salad tomatoes, meaty paste tomatoes, and huge, sweet, beefsteak tomatoes. Their colours range from deep crimson to orange, yellow, green, purple, and even chocolate. With so many varieties of tomatoes to choose from, you might be left wondering "what's the diff"? Crisp and crunchy, grape tomatoes come in a variety of colours that range from sweet to tangy. Thanks to their thicker skin, grape tomatoes hold their meaty texture when cooked, making them a great addition to a main dinner dish. These tomatoes are also great for snacking on raw, perfect for tomato lovers who just can't get enough! Roma tomatoes are a chef's best friend as they are inexpensive and full of flavour if manipulated properly. Roma tomatoes, also known as Italian or plum tomatoes, are most commonly used in cooked tomato products. These oval red or yellow tomatoes have less juice and seeds than slicing tomatoes, and thick, meaty flesh. They cook down to a thick, savoury sauce, making them the ideal tomato for processing. Fried green tomatoes, yes, it's really a thing... If you've never tried a green tomato before, you might be in for a surprise. Green tomatoes are actually unripe red tomatoes, which gives them their

acidic taste. You're not going to want to eat these raw. Once cooked, though, they have a bright, tart, irresistible flavor. The king of tomatoes. Red Beefsteak tomatoes are large and meaty with lots of juice, making them ideal to use as a base for fresh sauces and dips. They're the biggest tomatoes, often weighing 200g or more, therefore they make a great addition to your classic hamburger or BLT and can even hold their own as a patty substitute. Bottom line, any tomato goes well with a fresh slice of bread, cheese and a glass of good wine.

It is important to keep in mind that the nutrients of one food type does not give a complete picture of how to achieve a healthful diet. It is better to eat a varied diet than to concentrate on individual foods. However, you can't compete with mother nature. Not only are tomatoes delicious! Studies show that eating a plant-based diet including tomatoes and tomato products may reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and several cancers. They are a great source of vitamins and they also benefit skin, gut and eye health. The next time you're at the market, adopt a tomato. Either fresh, stewed, juiced, pureed or sun-dried, eating tomatoes is a delicious way to stay healthy. Bon Appetit.

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