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For Better Living
(Tomatoes - One of the Healthiest “Vegetables”!)

The tomato seems to have originated on the western coast of South America, in present day Peru, where eight species in the tomato genus still grow wild in the Andes Mountains. It seems to have been domesticated in Central America.

Tomatoes contain the antioxidant lycopene, noted for its ability to reduce the risk of prostate cancer in men who consume 10 servings a week. Tomatoes also contain vitamin C and carotenoids, beta carotene being one of the most familiar, which are antioxidants. These offer protection from free radicals that cause premature aging, cancer, heart disease, and cataracts. Loaded with antioxidants and high in potassium, tomatoes are one of the healthiest "vegetables" around. Another benefit--they're low in calories, about 35 for a medium tomato.

Selection

Tomatoes should be well formed, smooth and reasonably free from blemishes. Ripe tomatoes should be completely red or reddish-orange, depending on the variety. Ripe tomatoes have a sweet aroma and will give slightly to gentle pressure. To ripen tomatoes, place fresh tomatoes in a brown paper bag. As the tomato ripens, it gives off natural gas - ethylene. This gas speeds up the ripening process.

Storage

Store tomatoes at room temperature. Refrigerating under-ripe tomatoes stops the ripening process and destroys the flavor. Once cut, leftover tomatoes should be refrigerated.

Preparation

Three to four small tomatoes weigh approximately 1 pound. Cut fresh tomatoes just before serving.

Serving tips

- Dice fresh tomatoes and toss prepared 3-bean salad for a new taste for an old favorite.
- Stuff whole tomato cups with your favorite meat or seafood salad for a cool summer lunch or entree.
- Add chopped fresh tomatoes to prepared spaghetti sauce, canned soups, chili or casseroles for a fresh homemade taste.
- Alternate fresh tomato slices with sliced mozzarella cheese. Sprinkle with fresh chopped basil and drizzle with a small amount of olive oil. Serve as a appetizer or salad.
- Freeze tomatoes for use in soups, sauces and chili. To freeze: wash, peel and core tomatoes. In a saucepan, heat tomatoes until simmering. Cool by placing the saucepan in a bowl of ice. When cool, pack in freezer containers and freeze.

Broccoli 'N Tomato Pasta

8 ounces uncooked spaghetti
2 cups fresh broccoli florets
2 large tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons olive or canola oil
1/2 cup sliced ripe olives
1/2 cup minced fresh parsley
1/4 cup grated Romano cheese
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper

In a large kettle, bring 3 quarts water to a boil. Add spaghetti. Boil, uncovered for 5 minutes. Add broccoli. Boil 3 - 4 minutes longer or until pasta and broccoli are tender.

Meanwhile, in a nonstick skillet, saute the tomatoes, garlic and pepper flakes in oil for 2 minutes. Drain pasta mixture. Add to the skillet. Add remaining ingredients and toss to coat. Yield: 4 servings.