

In The Garden

Tomato

Cherry-sized tomatoes originated in Ecuador around 80,000 years ago and were part of the Aztec diet. In the 16th century, early explorers returning from their sea voyages introduced the small golden fruit to European populations. It was due to their color and size that the name “golden apple” was given to the first tomatoes grown in Europe. Today, the tomato is the most popular garden vegetable in the U.S., and is cultivated in nearly every country around the world. Red is the color we associate with tomatoes today.

There are around 10,000 varieties of tomatoes worldwide. Tomato varieties come in many sizes and colors including red, green, yellow, orange, pink, black, brown, white, and purple. Tomatoes form from a flower and contain seeds, technically making them the fruit of the plant.

However, in 1893 the Supreme Court ruled that a tomato should be classified as a vegetable because of its use in cooking.

Tomatoes are typically served as part of the meal and not a dessert. This classification also allowed imported tomatoes to be subject to taxes.



Tomatoes grow and thrive in the warm summer months between June and October. Tomatoes do not do well in cold temperatures and will not survive frost. Tomato plants are either Determinate or Indeterminate. Determinate tomato plants grow to a certain height and then stop. They flower and set their fruit in a shorter period of time. Indeterminate tomato varieties grow, flower, and set fruit over the entire growing season. The vines continue growing throughout the season too, so these varieties should be staked or caged.

The largest tomato was grown in Walla Walla, Washington. It weighed 10 lbs. 12.7 oz. That's a lot of tomato sauce!

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Handling, Storage, and Preparation

- Store tomatoes at room temperature for up to 1 week. Not fully ripe tomatoes will continue to ripen on the counter at room temperature.
- Damaged or cut tomatoes will deteriorate and go bad quickly.
- Add raw tomatoes to salads and sandwiches. Cut tomatoes begin to release their juices as soon as they are cut, so cut them just before serving.
- Tomatoes can be cooked in many ways—sautéed or boiled on the stovetop, baked or broiled in the oven, or seared quickly on the grill.
- Tomatoes can be frozen whole. Core tomatoes, place on a cookie sheet and freeze. When solid, place in freezer bags and return to freezer. Remove only as many tomatoes as you need for your recipes.

Uncooked Tomato Sauce

Ingredients

- 6 large tomatoes (cut into chunks)
- 1 tablespoon garlic (minced)
- 1/2 onion, medium (finely chopped)
- 1/2 green pepper (finely chopped)
- 3 tablespoons fresh basil (chopped)
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- salt and pepper (optional, to taste)
- 6 cups pasta (cooked)
- 6 tablespoons Parmesan cheese (grated)

Directions

1. Chop tomatoes and mix with all the ingredients except pasta and cheese in a large bowl. Set aside.
2. Cook pasta as directed on package. Drain and toss hot cooked pasta with tomato mixture and top with grated Parmesan cheese.

<https://www.myplate.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/uncooked-tomato-sauce>

