

How to store fresh tomatoes: Tomatoes can be ripened at room temperature. Once ripe, they should be refrigerated and should be eaten, frozen, canned or dried within a few days for best flavor. Prolonged refrigeration causes them to be mealy and lose flavor.

How to freeze tomatoes: They can be frozen whole, chopped or quartered with or without their skins in plastic freezer bags or containers for up to a year. So, if you have an abundance of tomatoes and not a lot of time to dry or can them and cannot possibly eat that many tomatoes, the best bet is to freeze them. It is easy and preserves their peak of freshness. Then, depending on what you plan to use them will determine whether blanching to remove skins and seeds is worth the trouble. If you like to add whole tomatoes or quartered tomatoes directly to a dish, then blanching would pay off. However, if you plan to can them later into sauce or juice them or use them for soup, then freezing with the skins is easier and much quicker. Freezing breaks down the cell walls and releases more juice. The further advantage to freezing tomatoes is that you can preserve them in the winter when you have more time and maybe more help and the weather is not as hot. Seems like everything comes ripe at the same time so this is a way to spread out the bounty and the work.

How to can fresh or frozen tomatoes: Fresh and frozen tomatoes can be run through any kind of food mill to remove skins and seeds or blended into a sauce for dried leathers, soups or marinara sauces. These sauces can be frozen as a sauce or preserved in jars in a water bath canner for shelf stable storage or frozen for use later in pasta dishes. Please be sure to follow a tested recipe to assure that the food you preserve is safe. Good sources of tested recipes are available in the newest "Ball Blue Book of Canning" available online and many local stores offering canning supplies. Or consult the OSU Extension service for complete food processing instructions at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>

How to dry tomatoes: Tomatoes can be prepared and dried easily. Dried tomatoes can be rehydrated to top your own artisan pizza or chopped to add to pasta dishes, pesto for panini sandwiches, biscuit and bread recipes or eaten by themselves as a snack. You can use your oven if it can be lowered at least to 250 degrees. Higher than that, the tomatoes dry too quickly and can burn. **OR** you can use a home dehydrator with a fan, temperature and time controls. Follow the manufacturer's instructions. I have used a simple one with no fan or temperature controls for 15 years with equal results. Store dried tomatoes in plastic freezer bags with air removed or stored in glass jars or in olive oil refrigerated up to 2 weeks. Tomato sauce can be dehydrated on a plastic wrap lined sheet to make vegetable leathers for pizza or a soup base.

Oven Dried Tomatoes

24 cherry tomatoes OR

8 to 10 plum tomatoes, cut in half OR

8 to 10 yellow, orange, red, or green tomatoes, cut into 1/4-inch-thick or thicker slices 1 tablespoon sugar (optional)

Herbs, such as basil, oregano, or rosemary, to taste

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions

1. Preheat [oven](#) to 250 degrees. Line a pan with parchment; for thinnest chips, use a Silpat baking mat. Arrange tomatoes, cut sides up, on pan, spaced 1/2 to 1 inch apart. Sprinkle with sugar and herbs; season with [salt](#) and pepper.
2. Transfer pan to oven; dry until juices have stopped running, edges are shriveled, and pieces have shrunken slightly; timing will vary depending on the variety, ripeness, and desired degree of dryness, 1 1/2 to 6 hours. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Cook's Notes

You can oven dry any tomato variety; each of the quantities given below generally fills 1 baking pan. Sliced tomatoes to be dried can be drizzled with olive oil, and sprinkled with dried herbs, garlic powder, cumin, before drying.

Need another idea for using fresh tomatoes? Try Gazpacho!

A cold tomato soup from Spain. The secret is in the tomatoes. Fully ripe, full-flavored tomatoes from your local farmer's market or your own garden make this dish delicious and especially flavorful. This is a basic recipe so feel free to experiment with the taste. If you are not worried about authenticity, there is no limit. You may prefer to thin it down or leave out the bread or leave the texture more chunky. Add dried or fresh herbs such as cumin, cayenne, minced jalapeno, avocado (provides creaminess) more onion, less onion, etc. Garnishes may include shredded crab, shrimp, croutons. Gazpacho may be served in a glass or a bowl. Any way you like, it is a refreshing dish for summer.

Tomato Gazpacho Recipe

4 slices of thick, crusty bread with the crusts removed (Portuguese or Italian bread work well)
2 pounds tomatoes, coarsely chopped
2 green peppers, coarsely chopped
1 medium cucumber, peeled and coarsely chopped
1 medium Spanish onion, coarsely chopped
5 large cloves of garlic, peeled
1/2 cup mild Spanish extra virgin olive oil
6 tablespoons white wine vinegar
2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
1 1/2 cups cold water
Salt

Optional: Finely chopped tomato, green pepper, cucumber, hard-boiled egg, garlic croutons and/or scallions for garnish.

Directions

1. Chop vegetables and sprinkle with 1 tsp salt. Soak bread in water and squeeze dry; set aside. Place chopped tomatoes, peppers, cucumber, onion, garlic, bread and water in a blender or food processor with olive oil and vinegars.
2. Blend until completely smooth and pass through a fine strainer in a bowl, using a spoon to extract as much liquid as possible from the mixture. Add salt to taste and chill before serving. Serve in bowls with toppings on the side to garnish to taste. Makes 6 to 8 servings. *(Recipe/Nina Terrero)*

Resources: Oven dried tomatoes: www.marthastewart.com
Tomato Gazpacho recipe: <http://nbclatino.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/gaspacho-2.jpg>
OSU Extension Service: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>