



## Cooperative Extension Service

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## Tomatoes

Fruit or vegetable? This has long been the battle over tomatoes, and a few similar foods (eggplants, cucumber, squash), dating back to the U.S. tariff laws imposed on vegetables in the late 1800s. The Supreme Court officially declared it a vegetable for tariff purposes, but most of us now know that the tomato is technically a fruit—it is the tomatoes' lower sugar content that makes it more likely to be used like a vegetable for culinary purposes.

Most of the tomatoes in the U.S. are grown in California, but even the higher elevation towns in Wyoming are able to grow tomatoes with a little persistence (and some luck). Nutritionally, tomatoes are low in calories and high in vitamins A, C, and lycopene, a powerful antioxidant.

Select tomatoes that are near their full color with a firm, or near-firm feel. If you have to get them inside while they're still green, tomatoes can be ripened in a paper sack or on newspaper in a cool, dark place (if this place happens to be your spare room closet, make sure you don't forget about them!). Once they are ripe, keep those tomatoes out of the refrigerator—extended cold storage can sap that great tomato flavor! Keep them on the counter-top instead, only refrigerate if necessary, and try to use as quickly as possible after they hit the fridge. Tomatoes should be washed thoroughly before use, as they have been implicated in a few foodborne illness outbreaks (likely cross-contaminated from another source).

Taste, texture, and nutrient value of tomatoes are highest when fresh. But for those lucky enough to harvest more than they can eat in the late summer months there are a variety of simple and tasty ways that tomatoes can be preserved. The simplest method is probably freezing. While tomatoes can be blanched to remove ('slip') their skins, it is perfectly fine to freeze them raw with their skins on. The skins will remove easily when taken out of the freezer and run under warm water.

Drying and canning tomatoes takes a little more time, but does leave you with a shelf-stable product. This is especially handy if you are running short on freezer space. Dehydrate your tomatoes to a 'leathery' stage—they should not be tacky or moist, and it is not necessary to dry until they are hard or brittle. These should be stored in a dark, cool, dry place and can easily be rehydrated in a couple of hours for a variety of uses.

Because the acidity of many tomatoes is right near the threshold allowed for water-bath canning it is recommended that 1 Tablespoon of lemon juice be added per pint of canned tomatoes. Also, make sure you are following a tested recipe from a reliable source! The addition of less acidic vegetables could result in an unsafe product.

The Sheridan County Extension office is planning a series of food preservation workshops (including some tasty tomato recipes) beginning in August. Please call our office (674-2980) ASAP if you're interested—the class is filling up quickly! In addition, up-to-date food preservation literature is always available at our office, or online at <http://www.sheridancounty.com/info/coop/overview.php>. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at [kwillis3@uwyo.edu](mailto:kwillis3@uwyo.edu).*