



Local Tomatoes are Best!

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in part in tastebud magazine, Aug. 2008

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Cherokee Purple, Box Car Willie, Radiator Charlie's, Mortgage Lifters, Hillbilly, Green Zebra – these are just a few varieties of heirloom tomatoes that bless us with their presence this time of year. We eagerly await these succulent, beautiful, juicy berries and put 'em in just about everything we can. And why not?

I don't think that anyone can argue that the luscious tomatoes available right now from your local farmer (or your backyard) are worlds apart from what you find in the produce aisle. The colors are surprisingly gorgeous, ranging from chartreuse, pink, purple, brown, and even striped. Heirloom or no, there's no comparing these summertime beauties to commercial crops, which are harvested green to withstand the journey and then hard-ripened with ethylene gas. This process deceives us; it turns the tomato skin red by eliminating the chlorophyll and with this cosmetic façade comes a tasteless tomato.

Because commercial crops typically come to us having logged many miles, there is more risk of contamination, like the recent tomato-salmonella scare. While not an absolute guarantee, purchasing locally can help ensure your safety, especially when you know your grower and can talk to him or her about their commitment to quality and safe post-handling practices.

Berry Cool

Both sweet and sour, tomatoes are very cooling, which makes them a perfect summertime food. Not only do they remove heat from our bodies, but they also promote circulation of body fluids, nourish yin (our expansive properties), promote digestion, and detoxify the blood. Indeed, tomatoes are one of our best sources of vitamin C, which is found in its highest concentration in the jellylike substance around the seeds. They also contain important phytochemicals with anticarcinogenic properties and lycopene and flavonoids, both powerful antioxidants.

I hate to present a "dark side" to these treasures, but consuming tomatoes in excess can weaken our whole system. Tomatoes are also both acidic and alkaline and one acid in particular, solanine, can upset our calcium balance, so people with arthritis or osteoporosis best avoid them.

Put 'em in a Salad, Put 'em in a Stew

So get out and treasure hunt this summer at your local farmers' market. Tomatoes are fantastic in grain and noodle dishes, soups, tarts, sauces, sandwiches, and are even great as an ice cream flavor! I promise that the table of plump, multi-colored jewels will be the first to catch your eye.

(An important tip: To maintain flavor and avoid mealy texture, do not refrigerate your tomatoes.)

HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



Tomato Ice Cream

2 large whole ripe tomatoes
2 2/3 tsp sugar (I prefer coconut sugar vs. cane sugar)
7 oz fresh organic cream
1 tsp orange liquor

1. Wash tomatoes and cover with wrap individually, putting stem at the bottom.
2. Cook on 100% power (high) for 3 minutes in microwave.
3. Cool in water and peel.
4. Strain in strainer, using wire whisk, make tomatoes puree. Set aside.
5. Combine fresh cream, sugar and orange liquor.
6. Stir the mixture into tomato puree.
7. Pour the mixture in a metal bowl, covering with wrap.
8. Keep in freezer.
9. Stir 2 or 3 times before freezing completely.

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