



Have You Heard?

By Doris Thomas
Lancaster Extension
Home Economist

A TASTE FOR TOMATOES

The fresh taste of tomatoes . . . is there any taste that says summer better? This is the vegetable I long for most when supermarkets offer rather tasteless winter tomatoes from south of the border.

Fresh tomatoes belong to one of the most colorful and varied of the basic four food groups: fruits and vegetables. And their nutritional offerings are as sweet as their flavor and aroma.

A medium-sized tomato contains 35 calories. For that very modest amount of energy, tomatoes provide 40% of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin C and 20% of the Vitamin A allowance.

They are also a cholesterol free food very low in sodium (only 10 milligrams). That's a real plus for those on special diets.

Tomatoes have a colorful history. They are native to the Americas. They were initially cultivated by Aztecs and Incas as early as 700 A.D. For centuries they were thought to be poisonous. The story goes that the myth was shattered in 1820 by a man who stood on the

steps of a New Jersey courthouse and ate a peck of tomatoes while a band played funeral marches and a few thousand people watched waiting! Well, he lived, and the Creoles in New Orleans put their cooking on the map with their tomato-enhanced gumbos and jambalayas. The people of Maine quickly followed suit, combining fresh tomatoes with local seafood.

Tomatoes used to be a high-acid food. Many tomatoes today are now a borderline high-acid/low-acid food. Without testing you cannot tell what the acid level is.

To guarantee that the tomatoes you can are a high-acid food and can be safely processed in a boiling water bath, they must have acid added. It's recommended that you add two tablespoons bottled lemon juice directly to each quart of tomatoes you can (add it to the

jar before filling). Halve the amount for pints. Add a bit of sugar to offset the acid taste, if you like.

The open kettle method of processing has not been recommended for many years and is particularly dangerous with tomato products. The questions I receive indicate that many home canners still use this method and, frankly, I'm worried because of the potential for botulism.

According to information I recently received from the Kerr Glass Manufacturing Company, research has shown that the time for boiling water processing times of whole or halved tomatoes packed in water, tomato juice or with no added liquid has been increased. They recommend processing pints and quarts for 85 minutes in a boiling water canner and 25 minutes at five pounds

pressure in a pressure canner.

To enjoy fresh tomatoes at their peak of flavor, use when fully ripe. Ripe tomatoes should be completely red or reddish-orange, depending on variety. They will have a sweet subtle aroma and will give slightly to gentle palm pressure.

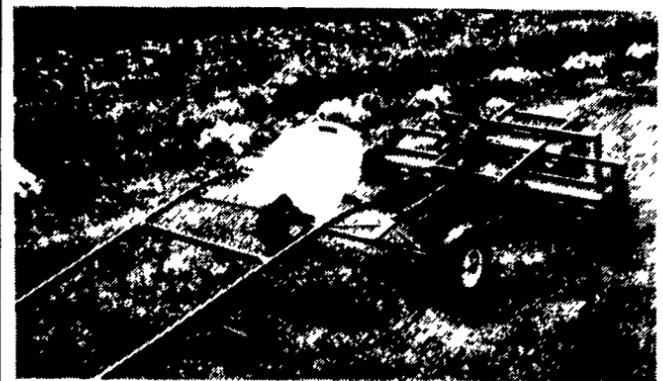
To hasten ripening, place fresh tomatoes in a brown paper bag or in a fruit ripening bowl. As the fruit ripens, it emits a natural gas - ethylene. This gas speeds up the ripening process when confined around the fruit in a closed bag or fruit ripening bowl. Do not place unripe tomatoes on your windowsill to ripen. They will sunburn rather than ripen.



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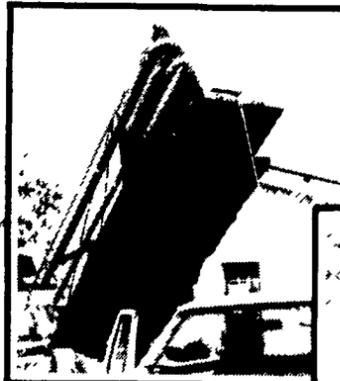
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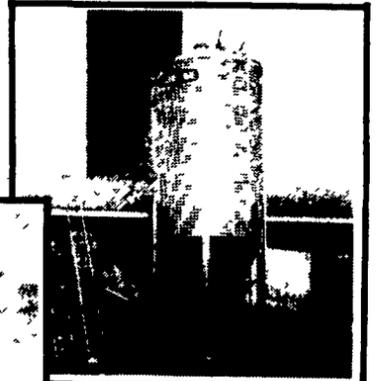
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