

Building Profitable Menus with Fresh Florida Tomatoes

A Guide for Culinary Professionals

Use this guide to explore the wonderful menu potential of tomatoes, as well as tips for ripening, care and procurement. You'll also find a collection of exciting tomato recipe ideas and hints from the Florida Tomato Committee's Annual Culinary Student "Celebrate Fresh Tomatoes" Recipe Contest.

Florida Tomatoes ... quality you can trust. Each field-grown tomato shipped out of Florida is regulated by a Federal Marketing Order that controls grade, size, quality and maturity. The standards are the toughest in the world and ensure that Florida tomatoes are the best you can buy. Further, they're grown under stringent government food safety regulations established by the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Food and Drug Administration and enforced by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Florida ranks as the country's largest producer of fresh tomatoes – accounting for 50% of the fresh tomato supply on an annual basis.

From November through May, Florida ships virtually all of the US-grown tomatoes – currently amounting to well over a billion pounds.

The tomato is just about the most popular vegetable in the US – even though technically the tomato is a fruit. It's not just their juicy, distinct flavor and appearance, but their health appeal that makes them so significant to diners across the country. Loaded with Vitamins A and C, tomatoes also contain lycopene, which has been strongly linked to a reduced risk of certain cancers. Match their popularity with the availability, versatility and ease of preparation, and chefs have a convenient, creative and profitable ingredient just right for culinary success.

Tomato TLC

Think Green Bananas. From November through May, most of the tomatoes you'll receive are grown in Florida. To prevent being



crushed along the way, these sensitive beauties are often shipped at the pale pink stage and may need a little tender loving care to bring about their true red and juicy nature. Although tomatoes are used as vegetables, they're really fruit, and just like any other fruit (think green bananas), they must be ripe to be fully enjoyed. If in-house ripening is a problem, consider ordering tomatoes from your supplier ripened and ready to use.

Avoid the Big Chill. With bananas, it's easy to remember not to refrigerate them because they turn brown. We don't have this "tell" with tomatoes. So, you just have to remember never to refrigerate! A chilled tomato will not finish ripening as cold halts the ripening process. Cold also kills the flavor of tomatoes, so even when the tomatoes are fully ripe, keep them out of the refrigerator.

More TLC

Where to Ripen? At room temperature in a dry storage spot, such as under or above worktables. A baker's rack also works well because tomatoes can be spread out on trays in a single layer and easily checked for progress.

How Long to Ripen? This depends entirely on the condition of the tomatoes when they arrive in your kitchen. How pale, how firm are they? A day or two at room temperature may be enough, usually no more than five. Just wait until you can see they're a rich red. A good rule is always to have some on hand at different stages of ripeness. This way some will always be ready when you are.

Which End Up? The stem end of a tomato is where it was separated from the vine. You will usually receive Florida tomatoes without their stems, possessing instead a scar depression with tender shoulders surrounding it. Always store your tomatoes stem end up. Leaving tomato on their shoulders, even for a few days, is enough to bruise them. And once bruises appear, spoilage will eventually follow.

Ordering Tomatoes: Florida tomatoes are packed in 10, 20 and 25-pound boxes, but the 25-pound box is by far the most common size ordered in foodservice. The quantity of tomatoes found in a box will vary depending on the size of the tomatoes.

Upon Arrival: Mark date on carton upon arrival. Rotate stock – first in, first out. Upon delivery, check the pulp temperature of samples to verify transport temperatures were above 55°F.

A 25-pound box of tomatoes may contain:

5x6 (extra large tomatoes):	about 38-62 tomatoes
6x6 (large tomatoes):	about 62-80 tomatoes
6x7 (medium tomatoes):	about 87-115 tomatoes

Tomatoes can also be ordered "Place Pack" – 18 to 20-pound boxes in which the tomatoes are hand packed in rows.



PREPARING TOMATOES

To Core: Using a sharp paring knife, make several angled cuts through the stem and under the core.

To Slice: First core the tomato and lay on its side. Cut a very thin slice off both ends, then slice to the desired thickness.

To Seed: Cut in halves crosswise and squeeze gently.

Note: seeds contain significant nutritional benefits.

To Skin: Submerge in boiling water about 30 seconds. Transfer to cold water and slip off the skin.

To Dice: Core, then slice with a sharp knife; stack the slices. Cut down through the stack into strips, holding the stack together; repeat the down cuts at a right angle.