

## **PART III**

### **PREP, COOKING METHODS AND RECIPE APPLICATIONS**

#### **Cutlery Tools**

In large production kitchens, the garde manger department in a hotel or a high volume contract feeding venue, the consistency and ease of serrated knives for cutting many fruits including tomatoes is often preferred. Serrated knives are always ready for use and do not need to be sharpened. Tomato slicers are also a popular cutting choice, and yield a consistent, measured slice. Other chefs and cooks prefer to use a non-serrated knife, such as a chef's knife, as they feel it provides for a more precise and exacting cut. The knife you choose is a matter of personal preference. It is important to remember, however, that a non-serrated knife must be kept sharp for working with tomatoes—a dull knife results in more injuries than a sharpened one.

#### **Preparation Tips**

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

Seeding: Lay the tomato on its side and halve with a sharp serrated knife. Squeeze each half firmly enough to push out the seeds. Discard seeds.

Slicing: First core the tomato and lay it on its side. Using a sharp chef's knife or a serrated knife, cut a very thin slice off each end and discard. Slice the tomato to desired thickness.

Peeling: To eliminate the skin in cooked dishes, gently lower 2 or 3 tomatoes at a time into enough boiling water to cover. Boil for 15 to 30 seconds, lift into a colander with a slotted spoon. Rinse briefly under cold running water, or shock in an ice water bath. Peel off and discard skins, or save for other use. The peeled and skinned tomato can then be diced (*concasé*) and used as a garnish or salad topping, or as a recipe ingredient.

Utilizing Skins: As an innovative and visually appealing garnish, cut and fry the skins to accent a plate presentation as you would with fried parsley, basil or spinach. Or, alternate colors with a variety of these flash-fried items. Another use is to dry and pulverize the skins and combine with a variety of salts for a unique flavor and cutting edge plating innovation.

Stuffing Shells: Lay the tomato on its side and, using a sharp chef's knife or serrated knife, cut a very thin slice off the bottom. Slice off the top 1/4 of the tomato and discard. (The top minus the core may be chopped and added to the filling, or used in soups, stocks, etc.) Using a sharp paring knife and spoon, cut and scoop out the flesh, leaving slightly thick walls. Salt the cavities lightly and invert on a cooling rack for 15 minutes to drain.

## Cooking Methods

Tomatoes are extremely versatile, whether used raw in salads, salsas, pestos, sandwiches, canapés, garnishes, marinades or dips, or cooked in stews, braises, sautés, or hot appetizers. Florida tomatoes can be pan fried, roasted, broiled, grilled and smoked. There are a large variety of recipes for traditional, contemporary and ethnic menu items or, use the ideas that follow to modify and modernize existing, classic preparations.

- **To marinate**, gently turn sliced, diced, wedged or chopped tomatoes in salad dressing or marinade. Let stand at room temperature 5 to 15 minutes.
- **To roast**, arrange halved or sliced tomatoes in a single layer on a rack in a baking sheet. Lightly toss or brush with seasoned oil or salad dressing. Roast at 450°F until tomatoes soften and shrink, about 20-30 minutes.
- **To broil or grill**, preheat broiler or prepare grill. Cook tomato halves or slices until slightly charred, 8 to 10 minutes.
- **To pan fry**, heat ¼ cup olive or other vegetable oil in a medium skillet. Dip thick tomato slices in seasoned flour or cornmeal. Fry until golden brown, about 2 minutes on each side.
- **To stuff**, prepare tomato shells as previously directed. Fill with stuffing; place in a snug-fitting baking dish. Cover loosely with foil and bake at 375°F until tomatoes feel soft, about 25 minutes. Stuffed tomatoes can also be microwaved; 6 tomatoes will take about 5 minutes.

## Contemporary Recipe Suggestions

Tomato Sashimi: Blanch tomatoes, slice off ends, scoop out flesh and slice the shell in sections to resemble sashimi tuna pieces. Drape over scoops of tuna salad for a playful contemporary presentation.



Tomato Napoleons: Update the classic tomato, basil and mozzarella combination. Create a vertical salad by alternating thin slices of tomato and mozzarella on top of fresh basil leaves.



Tomato Tartar: Season chopped, seeded tomatoes with olive oil, lemon juice, capers, minced fresh basil, nicoise olives and onion. Serve on endive; use as a dip, or as a topping for crostini, steamed fish or baked potatoes.

BLT Pizza: Top pizza dough with thin slices of mozzarella and tomato, drizzled with olive oil. Crumble cooked bacon and fresh thyme over pizza and bake. Finish with a “nest” of thinly sliced arugula for a new presentation of a popular combination.

Spicy Tomato Chutney: The deep red color and bold flavor are a perfect accompaniment to a cheese plate. Make a paste of ground cumin, fennel and mustard seeds mixed with shallot, garlic, ginger and vinegar and heat in oil. Add blanched and seeded tomatoes and cook until thick.



Upside-Down Tomato Cornbread: Line a buttered 9-inch cake pan with lightly seasoned tomato slices. Spoon cornbread batter over tomatoes and bake at 375°F until the bread is baked, about 25 minutes.

Composed Spring Salad: Grill halved tomatoes, asparagus and goat cheese wrapped in a thin slice of Prosciutto. Arrange on a plate with pesto and a sprig of fresh rosemary.



Caribbean Jerk Tomato Salad: Lightly grill tomato wedges brushed with a mixture of oil and jerk seasoning; toss with sliced avocado, hearts of palm and chunks of cool, cooked chicken or pork.

Charred Tomatoes with Garlic and Olives: Broil whole tomatoes until slightly charred, about 10 minutes, turning once. Remove skins; chop flesh roughly. Transfer to a pan; add halved garlic cloves, olive oil and salt; roast at 400° F, until thickened and flecked with dark bits, about 1 hour. Serve drizzled with more olive oil and chopped ripe olives. Use as a dip for pita breads.

Thai Tomato Spring Rolls: Wrap a mixture of chopped tomatoes, mint, pork tenderloin, lemongrass and peanuts in wrappers. Serve with spicy soy dipping sauce.

Tomato Granita: Blend blanched and seeded tomatoes with honey, vinegar, salt and pepper and freeze. Serve with a basil-infused syrup for a refreshing intermezzo.

Tomato Goat Cheese Soufflés: Fill tomatoes with a basic soufflé mixture made with goat cheese and chives. Bake until puffy and golden brown.