



TOMATO

The tomato belongs to the nightshade family: this perennial plant produces red or green berries (the real tomato) with a smooth and very resistant skin. The tomato is native to South



America and was grown for the first time in Mexico; Spanish explorers brought it to Europe. For a long time it simple remained a botanical curiosity, kept out of the kitchen: the tomato was considered unfit for eating because this vegetable was thought to be poisonous. This plant usually reaches a height varying from 50 cm to 1 meter; both the stem and leaves are densely hairy.

Even though the tomato appeared relatively late in Italian cooking compared to others foods, it has gained a very respectable position in our diet, being the symbol of typical traditional Italian dishes such as pizza.

The shape can vary from round, flattened, oval to elongated depending on the different varieties.

We can divide them in three main groups. **Ribbed** tomatoes : Costoluto fiorentino, Pantano, Samar; **round smooth-skinned** tomatoes: Ace, Montecarlo, Sunrise; **elongated** tomatoes: Maremma, Romarzano, San Marzano.



The tomato is the main ingredient in many sauces, in pieces or as puree, but also in salads and in main dishes. It is advisable to eat ripe fruits because unripe tomatoes contain substances that may promote the formation of kidney stones.



In the battle against ageing nothing is more effective than the tomato, the most powerful natural antioxidant. According to many experts, no medicine is more effective in fighting free radicals as the tomato; therefore it is possible to assert that a tomato, rich in beta-carotene, lycopene and vitamins, can

help against ageing more than any drug.



Here are the recipes of our chef Franco:

LENTIL SALAD WITH TOMATO AND SPRING ONION

Ingredients (for 4): 12 basil leaves, 2 tablespoons chives, 1 spring onion, 250 gr. dried lentils, 10 cherry tomatoes, 1 hot pepper (optional), white pepper, salt, extra virgin olive oil. Boil lentils in plenty of salt water for about 20 minutes and remove from the heat when they are still crunchy; if you want to soak the lentils overnight, the cooking time is reduced by a few minutes. Drain the cooked lentils and let cool.

In the meantime chop finely the spring onion, mince the chive, cut the hot pepper in rounds and the tomatoes in quarters or smaller pieces. In a small bowl prepare a mixture of oil, ground pepper and salt. Put the cold lentils in a large bowl: add the ingredients prepared before, the hot pepper and the basil torn into pieces with the fingers (keep some leaves whole for garnish the lentil salad). Dress with the oil mixture and blend carefully, add salt if necessary. Serve the lentil salad decorated with the fresh basil leaves.



Tomatoes filled with “panzanella”



Ingredients (for 4): 4 round tomatoes, 2 stale bread slices, 10 cherry tomatoes, 1 cucumber, 1 spring onion, black olives, extra virgin olive oil, salt

Wash the tomatoes, cut the top off without breaking it and scoop out the pulp. Salt the inside and turn upside down to drain excess moisture.

In the meantime prepare the “panzanella”: cut cherry tomatoes, spring onion, cucumber and olives in dices; mix with the stale bread, first soaked in little water and squeezed by hand and add olive oil. Blend all ingredients well and stuff the raw tomatoes with this mixture.

Summer lasagna with fresh tomato and robiola cheese

Ingredients: 300 gr datterini tomatoes, some basil leaves, 100 gr young spinach leaves, 300 gr fresh robiola cheese, fresh lasagna sheets, grated parmesan cheese, extra virgin olive oil.



Blend the robiola cheese with some salt and minced basil until smooth.

Wash and cut the datterini tomatoes in two halves and let them drain slightly.

Boil for a few minutes the lasagna sheets, put in a baking dish alternating with layers of robiola, young spinach, plenty of tomatoes, parmesan and basil.

Sprinkle with a few drops of oil and put the covered dish into the oven at 200° for about 20 minutes. Remove the cover and cook the lasagna au gratin for the last 5 minutes.