

Seasonal Eating Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Tomatoes for Winter January 2013

One of the prettiest sights on a dreary winter day is jars of bright red summer tomatoes on the pantry shelf. Taken at their prime and processed, these beauties are just waiting to brighten up a winter day with a hearty meal. My grandmother used to put up quarts and quarts of tomatoes from my grandfather's garden for the winter. When my mom and dad got married and moved away to California, my mother's first question to her mother was, "Where do I get tomatoes?". Apparently, you can buy them at the grocery store as well!



Canned produce is a lifesaver in the dead of winter. Canned tomatoes are the basis of many winter standards like chili, lasagna, spaghetti and hamburger goulash. Pasta just seems to fill you up and warm you up in the colder months. Roasting canned tomatoes can greatly improve and concentrate their flavor. Lightly drain your tomatoes first, reserving the juices for later, if needed. Spread out the tomatoes on parchment paper or a silicone mat with a little olive oil and seasonings (like rosemary and garlic) and roast at 350 until the juices are absorbed and the tomatoes are darker in color. You can do this with either commercially canned tomatoes or home canned tomatoes. In fact, they even sell commercially canned fire-roasted tomatoes for that concentrated flavor, if you don't want to do your own.

For a winter salsa for your super bowl party, combine the roasted tomatoes with roasted jalapenos, roasted garlic, finely chopped onions and cilantro. Add chips and dig in! Another appetizer is to spoon your roasted seasoned tomatoes onto toasted slices of French bread and top with freshly grated parmesan cheese. These tomatoes can also make a flavorful topping for a plain baked or sautéed chicken or fish when eating healthier but wanting full flavor.

The other way to get the most flavor out of your canned tomatoes is to slow cook them into a sauce over a long period of time. This is the basis for marinara sauce used in Italian dishes or full flavored chili. For marinara, sauté chopped onions and garlic then add tomatoes, seasonings and some red wine, if you wish, and cook for several hours, adding more liquid as needed. Throw in a few fresh tender herbs, like basil and parsley, at the end of the cooking time.

The recipe below for Chicken with Italian Roasted Tomatoes makes a great weeknight supper. You can make the tomatoes ahead and refrigerate for a couple of days if you wish. The balsamic vinegar, capers and Kalama-

ta olives give the tomatoes a special briny zing and the herbs and spices give it an Italian flair. I sautéed my chicken for this version but it would work just as well over a baked chicken or fish. Sides of noodles with parmesan cheese, green beans and garlic bread make this a hearty winter dinner.

So whether you use this recipe or use your own creativity, try roasting and slow cooking your canned tomatoes this winter.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>) and click on Seasonal Eating. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstrations will continue for 2013. The cost will be \$7.00 to cover the samples and January's demonstration on "Winter Comfort" will be on Wednesday, January 16 at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Office at 684-5971 to sign up.

Chicken with Italian Tomatoes

- 1 (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 6 ounces fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup halved kalamata olives
- 2 teaspoons rinsed and drained capers
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 small to medium boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- Salt and pepper

Lightly drain the tomatoes and place in a bowl. Add onion, mushrooms, basil, rosemary, oregano and 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Toss to coat and pour onto a parchment lined baking sheet in a single layer. Bake at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes or until mushrooms are cooked and tomatoes are slightly darkened and concentrated. Remove from oven and spoon back into bowl, add another tablespoon of olive oil, balsamic vinegar, olive, capers and salt. Meanwhile, sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper and heat remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a skillet. Add chicken and cook until halfway done. Turn over and spoon tomato mixture over the top. Cover and cook until chicken is cooked through and topping is hot.