



John Kessler is The Atlanta Journal–Constitution’s food writer and chief dining critic, food columnist and in our opinion, food guru. His columns are always entertaining and chock full of information, opinion and humor. Since tomatoes are starting to come into season, we are once again sharing one of his columns, one of our favorites, on how to enjoy an abundant tomato harvest. And, city dwellers, if you don’t happen to have a garden, don’t fret! Simply buy fresh tomatoes when they go on sale at the supermarket, and follow John’s 10 tips to use them.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution - John Kessler offers some ideas on how to use up your tomato crop.

1. **Grate them:** This is my favorite tomato trick of all time. Cut the tomato in half through the equator, pluck out the seeds with your fingers and grate the cut side against the large holes in a box grater set over a bowl. You will end up with a bowlful of gorgeous tomato flesh and a naked skin in your palm within seconds. What do you do with it? I like to keep going with other vegetables and grate cucumbers, peppers and a little onion for a quick, coarse-textured gazpacho that you season with oil, vinegar, salt and fresh herbs.

2. **Roast them:** Cut the tomatoes in half through the equator and place cut side up in a 13-by-9-inch baking pan. Sprinkle the top with chopped onion, garlic and any herbs you like along with salt and a generous drizzle of olive oil. Bake at 325 degrees for about two hours, watching to make sure they’re not drying out too quickly. If they’re still very juicy, turn up the

heat to 400 and cook a few minutes just until the juices start to caramelize. Pull the skins off with your fingers and pulse to a nice tomato sauce consistency in a food processor. Salt to taste.

3. Salt them: Here's the best thing to do with tomatoes if you don't care about seeds and skins. Chop them into a bowl, salt them well (say, one four-fingered pinch per tomato) and let them sit for 20 minutes. You end up with firmer, more flavorful tomato dice and a lot of delicious juice waiting to saturate any ingredients you mix with the tomatoes.

4. Strain them: If you're fancy-restaurant minded, then make some clear tomato water. Coarsely chop four large tomatoes in a food processor with a couple of teaspoons of salt. Over a bowl, pour into several thicknesses of folded cheesecloth. Gather up the ends of the cheesecloth, tie them in a knot and contrive some contraption that will suspend this bag of goop over a bowl in the fridge overnight. You end up with clear, intense-flavored tomato water for — what else? — an amazing tomato martini.

5. Toss them: Here's a great use for all those cherry tomatoes that start ripening first. Set a pot of water on the stove to cook pasta. Over a bowl, rip the cherry tomatoes into two to four pieces with your fingers. Add torn basil, olive oil, a crushed garlic clove, salt and coarsely ground black pepper. Take one of those big balls of fresh mozzarella, dice it and toss it into the bowl. When the pasta is cooked, add it to the bowl and toss. Yes, you want Parmesan cheese.

6. Juice them: Heat chopped tomatoes with a couple of ribs of celery and a couple of spoonfuls of chopped onion in a saucepan and simmer for about 20 minutes or until very liquid. Press the warm juice through a sieve into a bowl. Season with salt. And if you tell anyone you heard this from me, I'll lie through my teeth, but when it's still warm, season with a spoonful of sugar and a sprinkle of MSG if you're so inclined.

7. Forget Italy, go to Japan: I like to make a kind of mash-up of caprese salad and the Japanese chilled tofu dish called hiyayakko. You ready? Tough. I'm going to tell you about it, anyhow. Alternate slices of tomato and best-quality sliced tofu, firm or soft. Make a dressing of olive oil, soy sauce, seasoned rice wine vinegar, ginger, garlic and a touch of sugar to taste. Top with slivered green onions.

8. **Freeze them:** Remember that tomato pulp from above? Good, now throw four cups of it into the blender with a half cup of cilantro leaves, the juice of a couple of limes and a squirt of sriracha sauce. Pour the resulting goop over a cookie sheet and place it in the freezer. Every 20 minutes or so, scrape the frozen edges to the center of the pan with a fork. When you have nothing but red flakes of crystallized ice, you have spicy tomato granita. Place in a covered container and freeze until ready to eat.

9. **Cream them:** I bet you don't draw attention to the fact, but you love Campbell's cream of tomato soup the way you love, say, "White Wedding" by Billy Idol. Have you ever made your own cream of tomato soup? Then start sautéing a chopped big onion in butter in a pot. Add a couple of cloves of minced garlic and four to five big tomatoes, chopped. Add a spoonful of tomato paste and three to four cups of chicken or vegetable stock. Add two spoonfuls of raw rice. Bring to a boil and simmer for 20 minutes, until rice is cooked. Puree in the blender, strain the skins through a sieve and reheat in a saucepan with salt, pepper and a healthy glug of cream or half-and-half. You already know how to make the grilled cheese sandwich.

10. **Get corny with them:** You know that tomatoes and corn really, really like each other, right? Well, remember that bowl of diced salted tomatoes wallowing in their juice I just had you make? Great. Add the kernels cut from a couple of ears of corn, some torn basil, some olive oil, a good shot of red wine vinegar and some shaved pecorino cheese. When it's ready, invite me to dinner.

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