# A Harvest of Green Tomatoes

by Julie Cascio

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Growing ripe tomatoes in Alaska is a challenge, and gardeners often find themselves with an abundance of green tomatoes from greenhouses and gardens at the end of the season.

When frosty temperatures threaten your tomato crop, pick ripened and mature green fruit. Harvest tomatoes from vigorous vines since tomatoes from nearly spent vines are more subject to decay. Pick tomatoes before the vines are killed by frost.

After harvest, the quality of the end product will be better the sooner the green tomatoes can be processed or used.

If you choose to hold them before use, store green tomatoes in a cool place (55° to 60°F), in moderate humidity and with good air circulation.

Green tomatoes are low in calories and a good source of potassium and vitamins A and C.

## Ripening Green Tomatoes

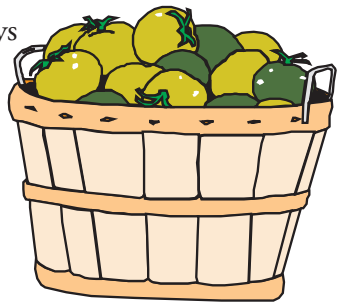
You may choose to ripen some of the tomatoes before using them.

### Method One

Pull the tomato plants up by their roots before frost. Hang them in the garage or crawl space where temperatures are 50°F or higher. The fruit will ripen over an extended period.

### Method Two

Harvest tomatoes before the vines freeze. Rinse and dry them before storing. Mature green tomatoes can be wrapped individually in paper or stored unwrapped. The most rapid ripening occurs at 65° to 70°F. Those ripened at 60°F are firmer and have less decay than fruits ripened at 70°F, although it takes longer. A high relative humidity (around 85 to 90 percent) prevents shriveling. Light is not needed to ripen the tomatoes.



Check tomatoes every few days to monitor the ripening. Remove the ripe ones and any that have begun to decay. Store ripened tomatoes in a cool storage area up to one month. Generally, tomatoes store best at 55° to 60°F in moderate humidity and with good air circulation. Do not store below 50°F or they will spoil.

### Mature Green Tomatoes

Green tomatoes will ripen better if they have reached "mature green." At the mature green stage, tomatoes are almost full grown, but do not yet show pink color. Cream-colored streaks are noticeable at the blossom end. The skin is tougher and not easily broken or rubbed loose when scraped with the thumbnail, and the fruit yields more readily to slight hand pressure.

Tomatoes are considered mature enough if the pulp that surrounds the seeds has become jellylike and the seeds slip aside and cannot be cut by a sharp knife when the fruit is sliced.

### Immature Tomatoes

Tomatoes that have not developed the jellylike condition and have soft, white seeds that are easily cut are too immature for harvesting with the hope of ripening.

Immature tomatoes, if they ripen, ripen much slower than mature green tomatoes and usually shrivel in the ripening process. This results in poorly colored fruits that have a tough texture and an inferior quality.

## Cooking with Green Tomatoes

Green tomatoes can be fried, sautéed or cooked in sauces and meat stews. They can be used as a pickle relish and even made into bread or cake.

## Fried Green Tomatoes

⅓ cup flour or cornmeal (or a mixture)
1 teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon pepper
1 egg plus 1 teaspoon water
4 to 6 green tomatoes, cut horizontally in ½-inch slices
vegetable oil

About 30 minutes before serving, combine flour, salt and pepper in a shallow dish. Beat egg slightly with water. Dip tomato slices in egg mixture, then dip in flour mixture. Coat both sides.

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a large skillet over medium heat. When water dropped on the skillet surface sizzles, fry tomato slices, a few at a time, until golden. Turn and brown other side. Drain on paper towels. Add more oil as needed.

## Green Tomato Egg Bake

4 slices bread, cubed
2 green tomatoes, thinly sliced
4 ounces Swiss cheese, shredded
3 eggs
1½ cups milk
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon dry mustard

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9-inch square pan.

Spread bread crumbs evenly in bottom of pan. Layer with tomato slices, then cheese.

In a bowl, whisk together milk, salt, paprika and dry mustard. Pour over layers in pan. Bake 40 minutes or until puffy and brown. Serve immediately.

## Stewed Green Tomatoes

2 tablespoons minced onion
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 cups sliced green tomatoes
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon curry powder
1 tablespoon parsley (for garnish)

Sauté onions in vegetable oil in sauce pan over medium heat until light brown. Add the green tomatoes. Stir and cook the tomatoes slowly until they are tender. Season with salt, paprika and curry powder. Garnish with parsley.

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## Green Tomato Bread

2 cups small green tomatoes
2 tablespoons sugar
⅓ cup shortening
½ cup sugar
2 eggs
1¾ cup sifted flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup chopped walnuts
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x5x3-inch loaf pan.

Cook 2 cups of small green tomatoes until soft. Add 2 tablespoons sugar and purée in blender. This will make about 1 cup of puree.

Cream together shortening and sugar; add eggs and beat well. In another bowl, sift together dry ingredients and add to creamed mixture alternately with 1 cup tomato puree, blending well after each addition. Stir in nuts. Pour into prepared pan. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until done. Remove from pan, cool on rack. Wrap and store.

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*Recipe from* The Versatile Green Tomato

## Green Tomato Pie

3 cups thinly sliced green tomatoes
1⅓ cup sugar
3 tablespoons flour
¼ teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons lemon juice
1 pie shell, unbaked
3 tablespoons butter or margarine

Combine tomatoes, sugar, flour, salt and lemon juice. Pour into pie shell. Dot with butter. Bake at 450°F for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°F and bake 30 minutes. Yield: 6 servings.

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*Recipe from* The Versatile Green Tomato

## Green Tomato Cake

½ cup butter
2 cups white sugar
2 eggs
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup raisins
½ cup chopped nuts
4 cups diced green tomatoes

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour a 9x13-inch baking pan.

Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs and beat until creamy. Sift together flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, soda and salt. Add raisins and nuts to dry mixture; add dry ingredients to creamed mixture. Mix well. Add diced tomatoes and mix well. Pour into the prepared 9x13-inch pan. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until wooden pick inserted into cake comes out clean.

# Preserving Tomatoes

## Freezing Green Tomatoes

Select firm, sound green tomatoes. Wash, core and slice or dice them, depending on intended use. Place in rigid freezer containers. For slices that will be fried, put freezer paper between the layers for easier removal. Allow ½ inch headspace inside the container. Cover tightly, leaving as little air inside the package as possible. Label and freeze at 0°F or lower.

## Green Tomato Pie Filling

(about 7 quart jars)

4 quarts chopped green tomatoes
2½ cups white sugar
3 quarts peeled and chopped tart apples
½ cup vinegar (5 percent)
1 pound dark seedless raisins
1 cup bottled lemon juice
1 pound white raisins
2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
¼ cup minced citron, lemon peel or orange peel
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 cups water
1 teaspoon ground cloves
2½ cups brown sugar

Combine all ingredients in a large saucepan. Cook slowly, stirring often, until tender and slightly thickened (about 35 to 40 minutes). Fill jars with hot mixture, leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids and process pint or quart jars 15 minutes in a boiling water canner. (See below for instructions on using a boiling water canner.)

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Complete Guide to Home Canning, *2nd revised edition. Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, United States Department of Agriculture.*

## Spiced Green Tomatoes

(about 4 pint jars)

6 pounds small whole green tomatoes
1 tablespoon whole cloves
9 cups sugar
1 tablespoon whole allspice
1 pint cider vinegar (5 percent)
1 tablespoon whole mace or
2 sticks cinnamon
½ tablespoon ground mace

Small, green fig or plum tomatoes are suitable for this pickle. Wash, scald and peel. Make a syrup of the sugar, vinegar and spices. Drop in the whole tomatoes and boil until they become translucent.

Pack tomatoes into hot jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Strain syrup and cover tomatoes, leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process pint jars 15 minutes in a boiling water canner. (See below for instructions on using a boiling water canner.)

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So Easy To Preserve, *5th edition. University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service.*

## Pickled Green Tomato Relish

(about 8 pint jars)

10 pounds small, hard green tomatoes
1 quart water
1½ pounds red bell peppers
4 cups sugar
1½ pounds green bell peppers
1 quart vinegar (5 percent)
2 pounds onions
⅓ cup prepared mustard
½ cup canning salt
2 tablespoons cornstarch

Sterilize canning jars. Wash and coarsely grate or finely chop tomatoes, peppers and onions. Dissolve salt in water and pour over vegetables in a large saucepot. Heat to boiling and simmer 5 minutes. Drain vegetables and return to saucepot. Add sugar, vinegar, mustard and cornstarch. Stir to mix. Heat to boiling and simmer 5 minutes. Fill hot, sterilized* pint jars with hot relish, leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids.

Process filled pint jars 5 minutes in a boiling water canner. (See below for instructions on using a boiling water canner.)

*To sterilize jars, submerge in boiling water for 10 minutes. Keep hot until ready to fill.

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Complete Guide to Home Canning, *2nd revised edition. Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, United States Department of Agriculture.*

## Processing in a Boiling Water Canner

To process in a boiling water canner, follow these steps:

- Fill the canner halfway with water. Preheat water to 180°F. Load filled jars, fitted with lids, into the canner, placing on the rack. Add more boiling water, if needed, so the water level is at least 1 inch above jar tops. Turn heat to its highest position until water boils vigorously. Set a timer for 15 minutes. Cover with the canner lid and lower heat setting to maintain a gentle boil throughout the processing time. Add more boiling water, if needed, to keep the water level above the jars.
- When the jars have been boiled for the recommended time, turn off the heat and remove the canner lid. Using a jar lifter, remove the jars and place them on a towel, leaving at least 1 inch of space between the jars during cooling.
- After cooling jars for 12 to 24 hours, remove the screw bands and test seals. Press the middle of the lid with a finger. If the lid springs up when you release your finger, the lid is unsealed. If a lid fails to seal on a jar, remove the lid and check the rim of the jar for tiny nicks. If necessary, change the jar, add a new, properly prepared lid and reprocess within 24 hours using the same processing time. Alternately, adjust headspace to 1½ inches and freeze or store in the refrigerator and use within three days.
- If lids are tightly sealed on cooled jars, remove screw bands, wash the lid and jar to remove food residue, then rinse and dry jars. Label and date the jars. Store in a clean, cool, dark, dry place.

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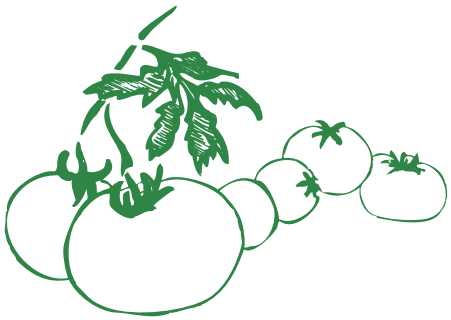

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