

An easy method and
a little time yield a
deliciously versatile
ingredient to use
dozens of ways

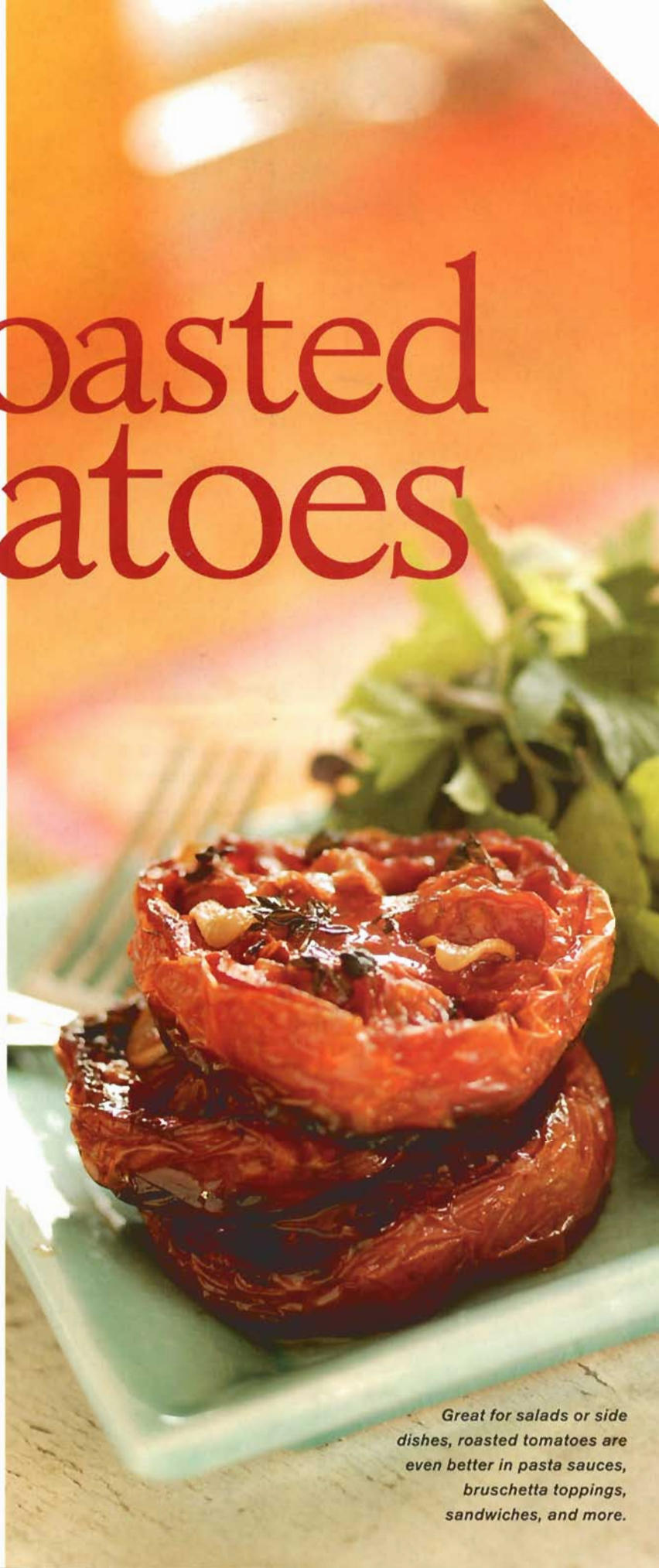
slow-roasted tomatoes

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON

Here's a tip: If you're looking for a secret ingredient to make your summer meals more special, you have to try slow-roasting tomatoes. This technique is so easy and yields such delicious results that I know you'll add it to your repertoire once you've tried it. While you're puttering around the house this weekend, tuck a pan of tomatoes in the oven, come back a few hours later, and take a look.

Not only does slow-roasting concentrate and caramelize the intense flavor of a beefsteak tomato, but it also gives it a meatier, more robust texture. The roasted tomatoes become versatile ingredients, perfect for tossing into pasta or salads, layering on sandwiches and crostini, or just using as a terrific side dish for grilled or roasted meats. They keep in the refrigerator for a week (or longer, I suppose, if you can manage not to eat them all first), and you can freeze them, too. A bonus is the lovely tomato-infused olive oil left over after roasting; drizzle it over grilled vegetables or on crusty bread, or use it in a vinaigrette.

The only secret to roasting tomatoes is not to undercook them. The technique is simple: cut tomatoes in half, spread them in one layer on a rimmed baking sheet, sprinkle with salt and herbs, and coat generously in olive oil. Roast slowly (for about 3 hours) until the tomatoes are a deep, rich brown and very collapsed. You can certainly use this method on less-than-ripe tomatoes—and they will taste better after roasting—but if you start with really meaty, juicy-ripe tomatoes, the end result will be out of this world.



Great for salads or side dishes, roasted tomatoes are even better in pasta sauces, bruschetta toppings, sandwiches, and more.



ready for the oven

after 3 hours



Excellent

Slow-Roasted Summer Tomatoes

Yields about 24 tomato halves.

If you don't have fresh thyme, you can use another fresh hardy herb like oregano or rosemary—or leave it out altogether.

3 tablespoons plus 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4½ to 5 pounds medium-large ripe beefsteak tomatoes (about 12), stemmed but not cored

Kosher salt

Granulated sugar

Scant 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

3 to 4 cloves garlic, very thinly sliced

2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line a 12x17-inch rimmed baking sheet (for sources, see p. 78) or two 9x12-inch rimmed baking sheets with foil. (Don't use unrimmed sheets or the oil and juices will spill out; instead, use several shallow gratin dishes.) If you have parchment put a sheet on top of the foil. Coat the pan or pans with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil.

Cut the tomatoes in half through the equator (not through the stem). Arrange the halves, cut side up, on the baking sheet, turning to coat their bottoms with some of the oil. Sprinkle a pinch each of salt and sugar over each half, and drizzle each with a few drops of balsamic vinegar. Arrange the garlic over the halves and top with a generous sprinkling of thyme. Pour the remaining 1 cup olive oil over and around the tomato halves.

Roast in the center of the oven until the tomatoes are concentrated, dark reddish brown (with deep browning around the edges and in places on the pan) and quite collapsed (at least half their original height; they will collapse more as they cool), about 3 hours for very ripe, fleshy tomatoes, about 4 hours for tomatoes that are less ripe or that have a high water content. Let cool for at least 10 to 15 minutes and then serve warm or at room temperature. Be sure to reserve the tomato oil (keep refrigerated for up to a week) to use on its own or in a vinaigrette. To store the tomatoes, refrigerate for up to a week or freeze for up to a couple of months. They'll continue to release juice during storage.

Quicker-cooking variation: Remove the seeds and gelatinous pulp (poke them out with your fingers) before roasting. These tomatoes cook more quickly (check for doneness after 2 hours) but yield a slightly flatter, less meaty—but perfectly pleasant—result.

Plum tomato variation: Substitute plum tomatoes, cut in half through the stem end and seeded. The roasting time will be about 2 hours. Roasted plum tomato halves hold together particularly well; layer them in a terrine or roll them up, stuffed with goat cheese and basil, as an appetizer.

A dozen delicious ways to use roasted tomatoes



- ❖ **Make a simple crostini** by topping a small piece of grilled bread with a roasted tomato half and a little slivered basil. Or **make a bruschetta topping** by chopping the tomatoes and folding in the basil.
- ❖ **For antipasto**, arrange a small stack of roasted tomatoes with a few good olives, a slice or two of prosciutto, a piece of really good Parmigiano Reggiano, some greens, and a piece of crusty bread.
- ❖ **For an easy hors d'oeuvre**, top a crock of warmed goat cheese with chopped roasted tomatoes, a few pine nuts, and a drizzle of pesto. Serve with crackers.
- ❖ **Make a sandwich** of aged Cheddar, crisp bacon, roasted tomato halves, and herbed mayonnaise.
- ❖ **As a warm side dish for grilled lamb**, reheat roasted tomato halves with a little crumbled feta on top. Garnish with fresh mint. Drizzle the lamb with the tomato oil.
- ❖ **Make a summery spinach or arugula salad** by adding fresh chopped roasted tomatoes, corn kernels, and
- grilled red onions. Toss with Lemon-Sherry Vinaigrette (see the recipe below). **Add sliced grilled chicken or grilled shrimp** to make it a main dish.
- ❖ **Mix up a quick pasta sauce** of roasted tomatoes chopped and mixed with their juices. Or **make a richly flavored puttanesca sauce** by adding capers, olives, and anchovies to the roasted tomato base.
- ❖ **Make a bed for grilled steak** by overlapping roasted tomato halves. Top with arugula.
- ❖ **Fill omelets, frittatas, and crêpes** with finely chopped roasted tomatoes and bold cheeses.



Lemon-Sherry Vinaigrette with Roasted Tomato Oil

Yields about 2/3 cup.

This vinaigrette is equally delicious using all olive oil if you don't have roasted tomato oil on hand. Drizzle it on grilled fish or steamed green beans, or toss it with mixed greens, fresh corn, and diced roasted tomatoes for a delicious salad.

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons roasted tomato oil (from the recipe at left)
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- Finely grated zest of 1 small lemon (about 1 teaspoon)
- 1/4 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper (about 6 grinds)
- Large pinch granulated sugar

- 3-inch sprig fresh thyme
- 3-inch sprig fresh rosemary
- 1/2 clove garlic

In a jar with a tight-fitting lid, combine the olive oil, tomato oil, sherry vinegar, lemon zest, mustard, salt, pepper, and sugar. Shake vigorously to combine. Add the herb sprigs and garlic clove. Shake well before using. You can use the vinaigrette right away, although the herbs, lemon, and garlic will intensify the flavor slightly as they infuse. This vinaigrette keeps in the refrigerator for a week.

Susie Middleton is the editor of Fine Cooking. ♦