

Simply Sensational Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Convenient, creative and packed with intense flavor, sun-dried tomatoes are a great addition to your cooking repertoire.

By Linda Coss

Sun-dried tomatoes, once considered a “gourmet” item, are now being discovered by cooks everywhere. Packed with intense flavor, they are a wonderful addition for everything from meat, poultry and fish to rice, pasta, potatoes, salads and eggs.

Before modern canning methods were available, the Italians discovered they could save their ripe summer tomatoes for winter use by setting

them out on top of their tile roofs to dry. This must have been a time- and space-consuming job, as it takes 20 pounds of fresh ripe tomatoes to produce just 1 pound of dried! Luckily for us, sun-dried tomatoes are now conveniently available at the local supermarket.

Sun-dried tomatoes have the same nutritional value as the fresh tomatoes from which they are made. They are high in Lycopene (a powerful antioxidant) and vitamin C and low in sodium and fat. They are available dry (just rehydrate them in boiling water before adding to your recipe) or packed in oil and ready to use. For extra convenience, oil-packed tomatoes are also available pre-sliced.



In a small bowl, stir together sun-dried tomatoes, vinegar, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil and lemon pepper; set aside.

Cut steak into thin strips and cut each strip into 1- to $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch long pieces.

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add steak pieces to pan; sprinkle with garlic powder. Sauté over medium-high heat, stirring often, until meat is cooked, approximately 5 minutes. Remove meat from skillet and set aside. Discard juices from pan.

Place onion in skillet and sauté over medium heat, approximately 2 minutes, until soft. Add cooked meat and sun-dried tomato mixture to onions in skillet. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, for 1 minute or until heated through. Makes 4 servings.

Add Flavor to Almost Any Dish

Once you start keeping sun-dried tomatoes on hand, you'll be amazed by how easy it is to be creative with this flavorful ingredient. Try these ideas to add gourmet flavor to everyday foods.

- Add to tuna, chicken, potato or macaroni salad.
- Finely mince and shake with your favorite vinaigrette.
- Add to meatloaf mix along with a good, healthy spoonful of prepared pesto sauce.
- Stir into spinach or onion dip.
- Layer on a grilled cheese sandwich. This is especially good with mozzarella.
- Stir into macaroni and cheese before baking.
- Sprinkle on top of pizza.

Sautéed Beef with Sun-Dried Tomato Sauce

This is delicious served over angel-hair pasta with some fresh steamed vegetables on the side.

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup julienne-sliced sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup balsamic vinegar**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon olive oil, divided**
- 1 teaspoon lemon pepper**
- 1 pound top round beef round steak**
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped onion**



Sun-Dried Tomato Spread

Serve this spread with crackers for an easy and crowd-pleasing appetizer.

- 1 (8½-ounce) jar sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil, room temperature, drained**
- ¼ cup packed fresh basil**
- ¼ cup packed fresh parsley**
- 1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic**

Place tomatoes, basil, parsley and garlic in a food processor that has been fitted with the metal blade. Process until puréed and well-blended. Serve either cold or at room temperature. Makes 1 cup.

Salmon with Tomato & Herb Topping

This is a great recipe for serving to company. It's elegant, delicious, simple to make and easily multiplied for the number of servings you need.

- ⅓ cup seeded and chopped vine-ripened tomatoes**
- ⅓ cup julienne-sliced sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic**

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 pound salmon fillet, approximately 1-inch thick

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Spray a shallow baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.

Place vine-ripened tomatoes, sun-dried tomatoes, oregano, chives, oil, garlic and pepper in a mixing bowl; mix well.

Place salmon, skin side down, in prepared dish. Spoon tomato mixture over salmon. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

Bake, uncovered, 30 minutes or until done. Serve hot. Makes 2 to 3 servings.

How to Store Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Sun-dried tomatoes are available dried or packed in oil, as well as whole, crumbled or pre-sliced for convenience. Look for them in your local supermarket, gourmet shop or specialty store. Unopened dry- and oil-packed forms can be stored at room temperature for up to a year. Once opened, store dry-packed tomatoes in a zip-closure bag in a cool, dark place for 6 months. Oil-packed tomatoes should be covered with olive oil and refrigerated for up to 3 months.





Fast & Easy Chicken Sauté

Serve this terrific dish over white rice with a mixed green salad and crusty bread for non-stop compliments at your next dinner party.

- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 (8-ounce) package fresh button mushrooms**
- 3 green onions**
- 2½ tablespoons oil from tomatoes, divided**
- 1 tablespoon Chinese 5-Spice Seasoning, divided**
- ¾ cup julienne-sliced sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil, drained (reserve oil)**
- Hot cooked white rice**

Slice chicken breast halves into thin strips and then into 1-inch pieces. Season chicken with salt; set aside.

Slice mushrooms. Chop green onions, including green tops. Set aside.

Heat ½ tablespoon oil from tomatoes in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken and ½ tablespoon Chinese 5-Spice Seasoning; sauté for 3 minutes. Add sliced mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes and remaining ½ tablespoon seasoning; sauté for an additional 3 minutes. Mix in green onions and remaining oil. Cook just until heated through, approximately 30 seconds. Serve immediately over white rice. Makes 4 servings.

Pasta with Roasted Vegetables

I like to team this up with melon balls and a loaf of crusty French bread for a meatless supper.

- 8 ounces spiral-shaped pasta**
- ¼ pound fresh green beans**
- 1 zucchini**
- ½ red bell pepper, seeded**
- 10 ready-to-eat peeled baby carrots**
- ¼ cup olive oil, divided**
- 1 tablespoon bottled minced garlic**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**



- ½ cup packed fresh basil**
- 3 tablespoons julienne-sliced sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil**

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Begin boiling water in a 3-quart pot and prepare pasta according to package directions.

While oven is heating and water is boiling, prepare vegetables. Trim green beans and cut into 1-inch-long pieces. Cut zucchini in half lengthwise and then cut into ¼-inch slices. Cut bell pepper into ¼-inch wide strips. Cut carrots in half lengthwise.

Place prepared vegetables in a 9 x 13-inch glass baking dish. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil, minced garlic, salt and pepper; mix well. Spread vegetables out so that they form a single layer in the baking dish.

Roast vegetables, uncovered, 10 minutes. Stir and spread back out into a single layer. Cook for an additional 10 minutes.

While vegetables and pasta are cooking, chop basil.

Place cooked vegetables, drained cooked pasta, chopped basil, sun-dried tomatoes and remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in large serving bowl. Mix well. Serve hot. Makes 4, 1 cup servings.



Mediterranean Chicken

This wonderfully flavorful chicken is one of my favorites.

- 4 large boneless, skinless chicken breast halves**
- ¼ cup julienne-sliced sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated lemon peel**
- 1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic**
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper**

Wash chicken and place in single layer in 9 x 13-inch baking dish.



To make marinade, place sun-dried tomatoes, olive oil, vinegar, lemon peel, garlic, cloves, salt and pepper in a small mixing bowl and mix well. Pour marinade over and around chicken in baking dish. Cover and refrigerate at least 7 hours (can be marinated overnight). Turn chicken over at least once during marinating time.

When you are ready to bake the chicken, preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spoon any sun-dried tomatoes that have fallen to the bottom of the baking dish back on top of the chicken pieces.

Bake, uncovered, with all of the marinade still in the dish, for 35

minutes or until done. Serve hot. Makes 4 servings.

Sun-Dried Tomato Rice

This is also a great way to use up plain cooked white rice left over from another meal.

- 2 cups water**
- 1 tablespoon butter**
- 1 cup long-grain white rice**
- ⅓ cup julienne-sliced sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil, drained**
- 1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic**
- ½ teaspoon lemon pepper**
- Salt to taste**

Place water and butter in a 2½- or 3-quart pot; cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low and stir in rice; cover and cook over low heat for 20 minutes or until all water has been absorbed. Stir in tomatoes, garlic, lemon pepper and salt. Serve hot. Makes 6, ½-cup servings. ■

Did You Know?

Sun-dried tomatoes were first made in Italy on hot, tile roofs for use in recipes during the winter months. With a little preparation, you can enjoy the flavor of homemade sun-dried tomatoes from the garden long after the last rays of summer sun have faded.

Plant meaty tomato varieties with a high ratio of flesh to seed, such as plum or Roma. Traditional drying can be time-consuming, so try the oven-dried method for excellent results in a fraction of the time. Harvest tomatoes of uniform size so that they dry at the same rate. Slice each tomato in half and scoop the seeds out with your fingers, leaving the fibrous tissue intact. Place the halves, cut side up, on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Sprinkle with salt and desired spices (marjoram and basil work well). Place the tray in a preheated 210 degree oven for 12 hours. If the tomatoes are drying out too quickly, leave the oven door slightly ajar. When the tomatoes are dry and have cooled, pack them into a sterilized jar, cover with extra-virgin olive oil and seal.

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