

Roasted tomatoes make summer linger longer

By T. Susan Chang, NPR

At this time of year, we all love tomatoes. Many of us claim we'll "take a big juicy tomato and bite into it like it's an apple," although you won't often see that happen in actual fact.

Yet, even people who love a juicy fresh tomato also are likely to enjoy it with all the juice sucked out, as in sun-dried tomatoes and – especially – roasted tomatoes. It's the way the process acts on flavors, caramelizing what's on the outside, concentrating what's on the inside. It's true even for a soulless, pale-pink January tomato. You can count on roasting to isolate and spotlight whatever sugars are to be found in that poor, hardhearted, well-traveled specimen.

But when you roast an August tomato – the Rita Hayworth of nightshades, seething in aromatic volatile compounds, complex with the sweetness of captured sunlight, intrinsically tart with citric and malic acids – well, then, you have something worth stopping the presses for. Dressed in caramel notes, with a suggestion of salt and a big wink toward vinegar, a roasted tomato's most memorable feature is its long, sensuous, deep and savory finish. It's a tone poem in umami, and by the time you reach the coda it's already instructed your brain to reach for the next.

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