

LUNCH FOR A RAINY DAY

Ingredients to Know

Which canned tomato is best? It depends on the job...



Whole Peeled Tomatoes

We reach for whole peeled tomatoes when making soups, marinara, or Sunday gravy. Their sweet flavor is the closest to that of in-season tomatoes, and they're peeled, so they're ultraconvenient. Our taste-test winner is Muir Glen Organic Whole Peeled Tomatoes.



Canned Diced Tomatoes

Good canned diced tomatoes have a fresh flavor and firm texture that make them one of our top pantry items. Most products are treated with calcium chloride (for a firm texture), salt, and citric acid (for flavor). Our favorite is Hunt's Diced Tomatoes.



Fire-Roasted Tomatoes

Fire-roasted tomatoes have a sweet, smoky flavor (some are actually charred, others simply smoke flavored) that adds complexity to a wide range of dishes—from pasta sauces to chilis and stews. We've found that the smoke level varies widely from product to product and that it mellows with longer cooking. We like the warm, intense flavor of DeLallo Fire-Roasted Diced Tomatoes.



Tomato Paste

Packed with savory-tasting glutamates, tomato paste adds meaty depth, sweetness, and richness to dishes. This thick paste is made by cooking skinned, seeded tomatoes until most of their water has evaporated. Our taste-test winner is bright, robust Goya.



Crushed Tomatoes

With no U.S. Food and Drug Administration oversight to regulate consistency, crushed tomato products differ greatly—from thick and saucy to chunky and full of seeds. We prefer our crushed tomatoes chunky—not thick like tomato paste or smooth like tomato sauce. Our favorite is SMT Crushed Tomatoes.



Tomato Puree

Canned tomato puree is fully cooked and strained. It has a thick, even texture that is especially well suited for long-cooked dishes like stews and ragus. Our favorite is Muir Glen Organic Tomato Puree.



Tomato Sauce

Canned tomato sauce is typically tomato paste thinned with water and usually seasoned with garlic and onion. We often use it in combination with other tomato products.



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Thawing and Reheating Soup

Cooling and Storing

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends cooling liquids to 70 degrees within the first 2 hours after cooking and 41 degrees within 4 hours after that. As tempting as it might seem, avoid transferring hot soup straight to the refrigerator. You may speed up the cooling process, but you'll also increase the fridge's internal temperature to unsafe levels, which is dangerous for all the other food stored there. We found that letting the soup cool on the countertop for an hour helps it drop to about 85 degrees; the soup can then be transferred to the fridge to cool fully. Transferring the hot soup to a number of shallow storage containers will speed the cooling process.

Thawing

For safety reasons, we recommend thawing frozen soups and stews in the refrigerator, never at room temperature, for 24 to 48 hours. (While it's possible to heat frozen soups directly on the stovetop or in the microwave, the texture of meat and vegetables will suffer a bit.)

Reheating

We prefer to reheat large amounts of soup in a heavy pot on the stovetop. Bring the soup to a rolling boil and stir often to ensure the entire pot reaches the boiling point. If you use the microwave, avoid reheating in the same container used to refrigerate or freeze the soup. Instead, transfer the food to a microwave-safe dish that's somewhat larger than the storage container and cover the dish to prevent a mess. Don't forget to stop and stir several times to ensure that the soup reheats evenly.

Buttery Croutons

Makes 2 cups

Either fresh or stale bread can be used in this recipe. For a flavor variation, substitute rye or pumpernickel bread.

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 tablespoon olive oil

3 slices hearty white sandwich bread, cut into ½-inch cubes (2 cups)

Salt

Heat butter and oil in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until butter is melted. Add bread cubes and cook, stirring frequently, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Transfer croutons to paper towel-lined plate and season with salt to taste. (Croutons can be stored at room temperature for up to 3 days.)