

Plant Exchange

Eye Appeal Whets Other Senses

Chef Staci's Tips

- Serrated knife such as a bread slicer with teeth is great for slicing tomatoes. Paring knife works well to core or seed the tomato.
- After dicing onions, place them in a colander. Rinse with cold water to make the onions have a milder, less sharp taste.
- If you are you are too busy to set up the boiling water bath to process tomatoes you want to save, here is an alternative: Pop the tomatoes in a Zip Lock bag and put them in the freezer. When needed, set the tomatoes on the counter to thaw or microwave them for about a minute, and the skin comes off easily before use.

HEIRLOOM TOMATO AND FRESH MOZZARELLA SALAD (ENSALADA CAPRESE)

Courtesy Chef Staci Stengle, Yankton Hy-Vee

- 1 pound heirloom tomatoes, sliced in ½ inch slices
- 8 oz. fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced in ¼ inch slices
- 2 T. balsamic vinegar or balsamic glaze
- 2 T. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 T. fresh basil leaves, thinly sliced or torn
- Kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper

On a medium to small pretty platter, alternately shingle slices of tomato and mozzarella.

Drizzle with balsamic vinegar and olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste and garnish with basil ribbons. Serve immediately.

To make this ahead, shingle the tomatoes and mozzarella and keep refrigerated. When ready to serve, carefully pour off any liquid that has accumulated and finish with vinegar, oil, salt, pepper, and basil.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Chef Staci Stengle illustrates how the sight of burgundy, red, orange and green heirloom tomatoes can be so appealing by shingling or overlapping rows of slices. See her recipes and alternative ways to prepare these tasty tomatoes.

ZUCCHINI AND YELLOW SQUASH WITH TOMATO ALMOND PESTO

Courtesy Chef Staci Stengle, Yankton Hy-Vee

- 1 c. almonds
- 1-pound cherry tomatoes
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 c. fresh basil leaves
- ½ c. olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 2 zucchini
- 2 yellow squash
- ½ c. Parmesan cheese

In a dry sauté pan, toast the almonds, tomatoes, and garlic cloves until tomatoes pop and cloves are lightly toasted. Place in a blender or food processor. Add basil leaves and olive oil and process until chunky smooth. Season pesto with salt and pepper.

Spray an oven-safe casserole dish and shingle the sliced zucchini and yellow squash. You can add a couple onion slices or tomato slices if you like. Drizzle the pesto over the top and sprinkle over with the Parmesan cheese and bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for 15 minutes or so.

Plant Shots



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Most plants have green leaves and use their chlorophyll pigment to make their food. Ordinarily these blueberry leaves are green. Plants, though living in a fixed site, have surprising defenses. Red circles appear on these leaves from leaf insect bites. The blueberry plant can use its blue-red pigments or anthocyanins to move to a location in the leaf. Anthocyanins contain antioxidants to protect plants. It's part of the plant's arsenal of defense. However chlorophyll is more efficient than anthocyanins in food or energy production. See more about this in How Plants Work by Linda Chalker-Scott.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Red verbena and blue Supertunia hybrids decorate downtown Yankton planters and baskets, and are found in other parks this season. Trailing verbena adds color and Supertunias continue to grow in mounds unlike Wave petunia hybrids that may sprawl late in the season. Most annuals will show sensitivity to extremes of summer in exposed locations.

September Plant Tips

JoAnn Fensel Ries of Fensel's Greenhouse, 500 N. Highway 81 in Freeman (605) 925-4204, has been gardening as long as she can remember. Her folks started Fensel's Greenhouse from a hobby in the 1950's. These days, flowering cabbage and other perennials, bulbs for fall planting, tree and shrubs are available here. Thanks to JoAnn for her tips:

- Plant or transplant trees and shrubs September through October. Fall soil temperatures and stable moisture will encourage new root growth. Check the Internet to make sure you plant it the right depth, how to water and mulch properly.
- Stop using fertilizer on perennials six weeks before frost. Covering the base of perennials and shrubs with soybean mulch will give the added winter protection.
- Divide your perennials now to revitalize them. If you have had them for several years, dividing them in fall is a good time to do that. Warm soils and cooler temperatures will give them time to create new roots. Dig around the outer edges of the roots and divide them into about four sections. Don't drown the plants, but keep them well watered. The perennials that bloom in fall should be divided in spring.
- Add some flowering kale to your patio or landscape now. This annual transforms your outdoor living space until temperatures fall to 25 degrees or lower. Your local garden center will probably have them in stock now.

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or let us know what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. See "Plant Exchange" blog

Dibbles And Bits



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Many forms of sumac such as this native smooth sumac, remind us that Autumn will arrive soon. Shaghorn sumac, especially "Tiger Eyes" is a favorite shrub or small tree sumac that turns yellow-orange in fall. Even smaller sumac varieties offer the color in less space.

- A deck or porch rail may be just the place to add décor you can see out the window this fall. All you need is a tree limb without leaves and zip ties from the hardware section of your favorite store. Hold the limb securely upright against deck rail spindles with zip ties. Then pick a theme such as "Autumn" and secure or hang objects that fit on the limbs. Find more about this idea in the October Garden Gate at the Yankton Community Library.
- Clusters of native sumac are predictable reds and oranges of fall in this region. Examples can be found at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area.

Many forms of sumac are well adapted to conditions here. The new Meridian Bridge Plaza by Riverside Park in Yankton has the newly installed 'Gro-low' sumac, a shrub that is said to turn red in Autumn. October Fine Gardening magazine features a cutleaf shaghorn sumac as having standout color. 'Tiger Eyes' is a shaghorn sumac that grows well in somewhat alkaline soil. Smooth sumac is also a favorite of many. Local nurseries have sumacs to fit large or smaller spaces in your yard.

• Why do weeds grow so well in lawns in hot summer? Lawns have had rain this summer, but blue grass and fescues

often go dormant in summer until fall rains return. Weeds such as crabgrass have an extra step in their photosynthesis for making their food. That gives crabgrass an efficiency edge over lawn grass in normal dry summer conditions. Crabgrass can concentrate carbon dioxide for photosynthesis. Then in fall when rains return, blue grass and fescues begin to grow again and compete better. Crabgrass's extra step in photosynthesis becomes a liability in the cool moist conditions. See more about this in How Plants Work by Linda Chalker-Scott.

Preparing A Tomato Can Be An Art Form

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or let us know what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. See "Plant Exchange" blog on Facebook or www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON

P&D Correspondent

Chef Staci Stengle of Yankton Hy-Vee Food Store, 2100 Broadway Ave. (605-665.3412) knows tomatoes are plentiful these days. She has a couple of tomato vines at home. She's here to help us start with a fresh tomato, show us many ways to prepare the versatile tomato, share tips and tell us what she learned about tomatoes on her recent trip to Tuscany.

START WITH TASTY TOMATOES

"First you feel it and then you smell it," she says. "The tomato should not be hard or squishy. It should have give to it and nice even color. Smell the stem end. It should smell like your grandma's tomatoes. If it doesn't, it won't taste like a tomato." You could pick a fresh tomato and smell it for comparison. "If a tomato is stored a long time, trucked a long ways or is grown in a hot house it may lose its freshness."

"I like big heirloom tomatoes or beefsteak tomatoes. They have juice and meatiness. Not too seedy and have lots of colors. You can mix slices of red and yellow or purple and green according to varieties. You can mix tomatoes because they have different flavors." The way slices are arranged draws the eye to them. During harvest more kinds of tomatoes are available.

"Great thing about tomatoes, is you can do salads, kabobs, put them in casseroles or make sauces. (For extras) you can freeze them, can or dry them," she says.

SOME WAYS TO PREPARE TOMATOES

"My favorite tomato salad is to rinse (tomatoes) off with a hose, slice, and sprinkle with a little salt, a little Balsamic vinegar drizzle, maybe extra virgin olive oil, basil and Mozzarella cheese," Chef Staci says. She also uses these ingredients with cherry tomatoes skewered and drizzled as an appetizer or tossed with cooked pasta.

She shares these recipes because most of the ingredients are being harvested now. The first, Ensalada Caprese, has colors of the Italian flag in the salad. Another Italian influence for Chef Staci is that she has just returned from Tuscany, Italy for a work/vacation and a week's vacation in Paris, France.

"We saw Ensalada Capresse on menus almost everywhere we went," she said.

Because the eye is the first part of the palate, using a pattern of different kinds of tomatoes in these recipes is pleasing to the eye. Slice the tomatoes and then arrange them in a color pattern on a platter or in the casserole dish with squashes.

Another option for the salad is to dice all the kinds of tomatoes about the same size. If bite size yellow pear tomatoes and various cherry tomatoes are available, arrange these colors and shapes in the bowl. The goal is to have pieces about the same size.

"Shingle slices of them, that is overlap one tomato variety with the next in a pattern of color on a platter or in the dish," she says. "When you shingle, it looks pretty. The textures of the food are more separate. You can tell one ingredient from another in a casserole." Eye appeal is followed by taste. That is why she puts effort to color, size, and pattern of the ingredients. Then health follows taste when you eat more food with more natural colors and variety.

AUTHENTIC FOODS

Chef Staci's work and vacation trip to Tuscany and Paris were first time experiences for her. As a chef, she experienced fresh food prepared by others who appreciate food.

"We had tiny mushrooms that are only available once a year. They were roasted with parsley. My mouth waters to think about it," she says. "Tomatoes tasted about like the ones in my garden."

Earlier in the summer, Chef Staci had prepared an authentic menu with Steve Aldrich, the kitchen manager at Hy-Vee for "Dinner en Blanc" held on the Meridian Bridge. Hy-Vee catered the Yankton Area Arts fundraiser.

"The idea was to ride your bicycle down the avenue in Paris," she says. "You'd stop at little shops to fill your picnic basket with baguettes, salmon pate, French cheese and dessert. You'd sit by the Seine River in Paris (or on the Missouri River) and have a French picnic." Of course she hadn't experienced Paris yet herself.

"It was like that in Paris!" she says. She noticed people going one shop to another looking for what is fresh today. "Fresher is better, healthier; fresh and organic and produced with local growers." She sees examples of this trend where she works.