



Summer Tomato & Bread Soup with Basil

Make this delicious, rich-flavored soup when you have an excess of ripe tomatoes on hand. If you're lucky enough to have prolific tomato plants in the garden, this is one of the best things you can do with an abundant harvest. You can make this from all the same variety of tomatoes, such as Roma or Early Girl, or use anything and everything you have on hand.

Although you can serve this thick soup as a starter for any dinner, it also makes a great main dish for lunch or hot summer nights when you don't feel like eating anything heavy. Follow with a salad of mixed greens.

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| About 8 pounds | ripe tomatoes (one variety or a mixture) |
| 4 or 5 | cloves garlic, finely chopped |
| 2 tbsp | extra-virgin olive oil |
| 2 to 3 cups | boiling water |
| Good-sized piece | Parmigiano Reggiano |
| 1 to 2 handfuls | fresh basil leaves, small leaves left whole, large leaves torn or coarsely chopped |
| 10 to 12 | torn chunks of good-quality, country-style bread (preferably day-old with crust on), such as <i>pain au levain</i> or sourdough (each chunk about the size of a tomato) |

Peel tomatoes: With a sharp paring knife, cut out the core of each tomato and cut a small "x" in the bottom end. Then immerse tomatoes in boiling water for about 30 to 60 seconds. Drain water and let tomatoes cool for a minute or so. Skin will peel off easily.

Cut tomatoes in half horizontally and using your fingers, remove seeds. (I usually do this over the sink.) If some remain, that's fine. As you seed the tomatoes, place the seeded tomato halves in a strainer over a bowl or plate to catch the juices. (If tomatoes are excessively large, such as big beefsteak tomatoes, you can cut them in quarters; otherwise, there's no need to chop tomatoes once they've been peeled and seeded.)

In a large deep sauté pan or heavy soup pot, heat olive oil. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant; do not brown. Then add tomatoes and cook over medium-high heat, stirring, until boiling. Reduce heat and gently simmer for about 20 to

30 minutes, until mixture becomes quite thick. Add boiling water and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Add bread chunks and basil and stir to mix well. Continue simmering just until mixture is heated through. Turn off heat and let soup sit on burner for about an hour or more until mealtime.

Just before serving, reheat over low heat just until heated through. Taste and adjust seasoning. Spoon into serving bowls and sprinkle each portion with a little grated Parmigiano. In addition, I usually offer a wedge of cheese and a grater at the table.

Makes 4 main-course or 8 first-course servings.