

INSALATA CAPRESE

Makes 4 servings



INGREDIENTS

2 pounds ripe tomatoes (about 4 large tomatoes)

1 pound fresh mozzarella

1 bunch fresh basil leaves

3 tablespoons olive oil

Salt and pepper, to taste

Optional: 1 tablespoon fresh or dried oregano

Optional: 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

NOTES

A variation on this salad is to use cherry tomatoes, sliced in half, and small “pearl” mozzarella. Salad can be prepared ahead and chilled in fridge for up to 4 hours.

DIRECTIONS

1. With a serrated or very sharp knife, slice tomatoes into 1/4 inch thick slices. If using cherry tomatoes, slice each cherry tomato in half.
2. Slice mozzarella into 1/4 inch thick slices. If using pearl mozzarella, slice each pearl in half.
3. Remove basil leaves from stems. Discard stems.
4. On a large plate, place a slice of mozzarella, and then a slice of tomato, and then a basil leaf. Repeat until the plate is covered with mozzarella, tomato, and basil layers. If using cherry tomatoes and pearl mozzarella, use a shallow bowl.
5. Drizzle olive oil, and a pinch of salt and pepper. If using, garnish with oregano and drizzle with balsamic vinegar. Enjoy!



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FUN FACTS

Tomatoes originate in the South American Andes mountains, around the area of modern day Peru. The first recorded instance of tomatoes being used as food was by the Aztecs of Southern Mexico.

Botanically, tomatoes are a fruit - they grow from a flowering plant and contain seeds. The United States Supreme Court, however, ruled that tomatoes - classified by its culinary use - are vegetables.

Tomatoes are the state vegetable of New Jersey.

There are more than 7,500 varieties of tomato grown around the world. While many varieties are red, tomatoes can be green, orange, pink, black, brown, white, purple, and, Mrs. Ritz' favorite: yellow.

Tomatoes are rich in lycopene, an antioxidant that is good for the heart and helps prevent cancer. Cooked tomatoes are better for you than raw tomatoes, as higher amounts of beneficial compounds and vitamins are released, including vitamins A and C, calcium, and potassium.

The town of Buñol in Spain holds an annual tomato festival called La Tomatina, which involves more than 40,000 people throwing 150,000 tomatoes at each other.

Mozzarella was first made in Southern Italy near Naples.

Originally, mozzarella was only made with buffalo milk. Now, it is often made with cow milk, sometimes referred to as "fior di latte," or "flower of milk."

Mozzarella is the most popular cheese on Earth, perhaps because of its ideal consistency and meltability for pizza.

Olive trees can live between 300 and 600 years.

On average, the world consumes more than 2.25 million tons of olive oil every year.

All olives start out green and then turn black or purple as they ripen.

California is responsible for 99% of the United States' olive oil production.

Olive oil is naturally cholesterol, sodium, and carbohydrate-free. It is considered amongst the healthiest of oils.