

A dash of salt grows healthier tomatoes

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Watering tomato plants with diluted seawater boosts levels of antioxidants, scientists report. Credit: Courtesy of public-domain-photos.com

Watering tomatoes with diluted seawater can boost their content of disease-fighting antioxidants and may lead to healthier salads, appetizers, and other tomato-based foods, scientists in Italy report. Their study is scheduled for the May 14 issue of ACS' *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*.

Besides their use in a variety of ethnic food dishes, tomatoes are one of the most commonly grown home garden vegetables, particularly cherry tomatoes. Scientists have linked tomatoes to several health benefits, including protection against prostate cancer and heart disease.

Researchers have known for years that seawater does not stimulate the growth of tomatoes, but scientists know little about its effects on the nutritional content of the vegetables.

In the new study, Riccardo Izzo and colleagues grew cherry tomatoes in both freshwater and in a dilute solution of 12 percent seawater. They found that ripe tomatoes grown in the salty water showed higher levels of vitamin C, vitamin E, dihydrolipoic acid, and chlorogenic acid. All of these substances are antioxidants that appear to fight heart disease, cancer, aging, and other conditions.

Using saltwater to irrigate tomato crops also appears to be a promising alternative to freshwater irrigation, especially in the wake of water shortages in some parts of the world, the researchers note.

Source: ACS

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