

QUESTION OF THE WEEK**Q:** What else is good in my garden?

Tomatoes! This time of year tomatoes abound in Southwest Florida. We all know that eating tomatoes is healthy, but what exactly are the health benefits?

The tomato — *lycopersicon esculatum* — sometimes called the “love apple,” continues to be examined for its medicinal effects.

**Auld**

Studies have shown that high tomato consumption may be linked to lower incidence of certain cancers because of its antioxidant properties, especially the carotenoid, lycopene. Smokers, those with high blood lipids and heavy alcohol users were generally found to have lower blood lycopene levels. Lycopene, found abundantly in tomatoes, has been linked to a decreased incidence of prostate, cervix, pancreas and stomach cancers.

Lycopene supplements for eye health, especially macular degeneration, were given only a “C” rating by the Mayo Clinic, however. This may be because when lycopene is taken as a supplement,

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isolated from the rest of the tomato, up to 57 percent of the antioxidant properties were lost. It is, therefore, prudent to eat more tomatoes rather than substituting a supplement. Interestingly, canned or cooked tomatoes actually contain more lycopene than a raw tomato. And yes, ketchup counts as a good source!

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