

Ways to Use Fermented Cherry Tomatoes

The jar is done. This is what it is for. One ferment, three dishes, every other use worth knowing, and what to do with the brine.

hero photo: the plated feta, torched, on the honey

Six things to know before you start

Never marinate a protein in straight acid. Lemon, lime, or vinegar on its own turns the outside of chicken chalky in under an hour. Oil is what slows the acid down. Always oil first, acid second.

Pound for evenness, not thinness. A mallet does two different jobs. Here it is levelling the breast so the thick end and the thin end finish at the same moment. Leave it thick.

Oil-cured olives, not brined. Brined olives add a fourth sour, salty note to a plate that already has a ferment on it, and the whole thing goes muddy. Oil-cured olives bring bitterness and depth instead.

Pecorino on top, Parmigiano in the sauce. They are not interchangeable. Pecorino is sharper and saltier and sits dry over the chicken in place of finishing salt. Parmigiano is nuttier and gentler and melts into the pasta.

Fresh things go on last. Basil, fresh shallot, torn herbs. They are the only bright notes on a plate where everything else is preserved, and they darken the moment they meet heat or acid.

The sauce never sees heat. Heat dulls the tang you spent a week building. In every dish here the tomatoes go on at the end, off the heat, or never near it at all.

The One to Make First

Fermented Cherry Tomatoes over Feta with Garlic Toast

Salt, acid, fat, and a little sweetness, all in one bite. The tomatoes did the work weeks ago. This takes about ten minutes and it does not taste like it.

The Toast

- 1 Slice a baguette on the bias, about half an inch thick. Drizzle both sides with olive oil.
- 2 Toast hard, in a hot oven or a dry pan, until it is properly crisp and browned at the edges. A soft toast collapses under a wet topping.
- 3 While it is still hot, rub one cut side with a raw garlic clove. The rough surface does the grating for you. Rub after toasting, never before, or the garlic burns and turns bitter.

Three Ways to Serve It

- 1 **Everyday.** Spoon the tomatoes over dressed greens. This version wants more olive oil, because the greens bring no fat of their own.
- 2 **For the board.** A slab of feta, tomatoes spooned over, toasts alongside. Two per plate, or stacked on a board for the table.
- 3 **Plated, for company.** Honey on the plate first, then the feta, then the tomatoes, then fresh herbs, finished with cracked pepper. Torch the feta at each plate, or run the slices under the broiler until the edges catch and blister.

Building the Plate

Layer	What it does
Raw honey, on the plate	Goes down first so it sweetens the bite without muddying the tomatoes. An infused honey works beautifully here.
Feta, warm	A slab, not crumbles. Torched or broiled until the edges sear. Warm feta against cold ferment is the whole point of the dish.

Fermented tomatoes	Drained, lightly smashed, with their garlic and shallot. Cold, straight from the jar.
Fresh herbs	Basil or mint, torn at the last moment so they do not darken.
Cracked pepper	Cracked over at the table, not ground in advance.

Serve at room temperature. Cold from the refrigerator, the oil goes cloudy and the feta loses its flavor. Take the jar out twenty minutes before you need it.

The Spooned Dressing

Enough for a large salad, a pound of green beans, or four plated servings.

Fermented cherry tomatoes, drained and lightly smashed	1/2 cup
Fermented garlic from the jar, minced	2 cloves
Fermented shallot from the jar, finely diced	1
Olive oil	2 tbsp
Lemon juice, or a splash of the brine	1 tbsp
Dried oregano	pinch
Crushed red pepper flakes	pinch
Black pepper, and salt only if needed	to taste
Fresh basil or mint, torn (optional)	a few leaves

- 1** Rub the oregano between your palms into the olive oil. Dried herbs need fat and friction to wake up.
- 2** Whisk in the lemon juice or brine.
- 3** Stir in the drained tomatoes, garlic, and shallot. Add the pepper flakes and black pepper.
- 4** Let it sit twenty minutes, then taste. Only now decide about salt. The ferment brings its own, and tasting too early is how a dressing gets over-salted.
- 5** Tear in the herbs at the very end.

Lemon or brine is a choice, not a substitution. Lemon is bright and adds no salt. Brine is funkier, saltier, and tastes more of the jar. Make it once each way.

Why there is so little oil

A vinaigrette normally runs three parts oil to one part acid, because it is landing on greens that bring nothing of their own. This dish lands on feta and oiled toast. The fat is already on the plate, so the spoonful is not there to add richness. It is there to cut it.

Two parts oil to one part acid, or less. Trust the plate, not the rule. Greens version: more oil. Feta version: less. Same tomatoes, different job.

Keep it cold

This goes in the refrigerator and keeps about a week. It does not sit out on the counter. Raw garlic in oil at room temperature is a botulism risk, and while the ferment and the lemon here are both protective, a covered dish of oil and garlic left out is not something to take a chance on.

The Second Dish

Grilled Chicken with Fermented Tomatoes, Olives, and Pecorino

Serves four. Everything on this plate except the shallot and the basil was preserved weeks ago, which is exactly why those two have to be fresh.

The Chicken

Boneless, skinless chicken breasts	2 large, about 1½ lb
Olive oil	¼ cup
Fresh lemon juice (or half lemon, half lime)	2 tbsp
Garlic, smashed	3 cloves
Black pepper	a few grinds

To finish

Fermented cherry tomatoes, halved	¾ cup
Fresh shallot, sliced paper thin	1 small
Oil-cured black olives, pitted and torn	⅓ cup
Fresh basil, torn	a good handful
Pecorino Romano, shaved with a peeler	about 1 oz
Olive oil, to finish	a drizzle

- 1 Trim the breasts. Turn each one over and find the thin strip of white cartilage running along the underside of the thick end. Cut it out. It never softens and it is the reason a bite of breast is sometimes chewy for no reason.
- 2 Lay each breast between two sheets of parchment and pound it to an even thickness, about three quarters of an inch. You are levelling it, not flattening it. The thick end comes down to meet the thin end so the whole piece finishes at the same time.
- 3 Whisk the oil, lemon juice, garlic, and pepper. Turn the chicken in it, cover, and refrigerate. **Four hours at the most.** The oil slows the acid, but it does not stop it, and past four hours the surface starts to go chalky.
- 4 Grill over high heat, four to six minutes a side, until the thickest part reads 160°F. Move it to a plate, tent loosely, and rest at least five minutes. It climbs to 165°F on its own.
- 5 Slice or leave whole. Lay the tomato halves over the top cut side down so the juice runs into the meat. Scatter the shallot and olives.
- 6 Basil last, after the rest, so it stays green. Shave the pecorino over the whole plate and finish with a thread of olive oil.

No salt shaker touches this plate

The pecorino is the seasoning. It brings salt, funk, and a dry texture in one ingredient, and the ferment and the olives are salty on their own. Taste before you reach for anything.

Fermented shallots from the jar would be the easy choice here. Do not use them. Everything else on the plate is preserved, and the fresh shallot and the basil are the only bright notes. Take them away and the plate goes flat.

The Third Dish

Linguine with a No-Cook Fermented Tomato Sauce

Serves four. The sauce is made in the serving bowl while the pasta cooks. Nothing about it ever touches a burner.

Linguine	1 lb
Fermented cherry tomatoes, roughly chopped	1½ cups
Fermented shallots from the jar, finely chopped	2
Olive oil	⅓ cup
Parmigiano Reggiano, finely grated, plus more to serve	¾ cup
Black pepper, coarsely cracked	plenty
Fresh basil, torn at the last moment	1 cup, loosely packed
Reserved pasta water	about ½ cup
Salt, for the pasta water only	

- 1** Bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt it well. This is the only salt in the dish.
- 2** While it heats, put the chopped tomatoes and shallots in a wide serving bowl with the olive oil and the pepper. Leave it on the counter. It is done.
- 3** Cook the linguine to just shy of al dente. Before draining, dip out a cup of the cooking water and set it aside.
- 4** Drain and drop the hot pasta straight into the bowl. Add half a cup of the pasta water and the Parmigiano and toss hard with tongs until the oil, cheese, and water pull together into a glossy coat on every strand. If it tightens, add a splash more water.
- 5** Tear in the basil, toss once, and serve with more cheese at the table.

Why it works

The pasta water is the emulsifier, not a thinner. The starch in it is what lets oil and cheese cling to the pasta instead of pooling in the bottom of the bowl. Plain water would just make it wet.

Long pasta, and linguine in particular. The flat face carries a thin sauce the way a round strand cannot. And it is Parmigiano here, not pecorino: pecorino would seize and turn the whole bowl sharp.

Every Other Way to Use Them

Cold, straight from the jar

- On a cheese or charcuterie board, with the garlic cloves left whole alongside.
- In place of fresh tomato on a sandwich, with cheese, herbs, and olive oil.
- Tossed into green, pasta, grain, or bean salads.
- Chopped and folded into softened butter or cream cheese for a quick spread.
- Halved over a burrata, with good oil and torn basil.

Warm, added at the end

Heat dulls the tang you spent a week building, so add them off the heat or in the last minute of cooking.

- Spooned over scrambled eggs, an omelette, or breakfast hash.
- Stirred through hot pasta off the heat, with olive oil and pecorino.
- Over roasted vegetables, especially cauliflower, potatoes, and green beans.
- Alongside roast chicken or fish, in place of a sauce.
- Folded into warm white beans with oil and rosemary.

Do Not Pour Out the Brine

The brine is the second half of the jar, and most people throw it away. It is sour, salty, garlicky, and alive.

- As the acid in any vinaigrette, in place of some or all of the vinegar.
- A splash into soups, beans, or a pot of greens at the end of cooking.
- Brining chicken before roasting, or thinning a marinade.
- Loosening a spread, a dip, or a bowl of hummus.
- Stirred into a Bloody Mary, or drunk cold in a small glass, which is how it is often used in Poland and Ukraine.
- As a starter splash for your next batch of fermented vegetables.

Once the tomatoes are gone, the brine keeps a couple of weeks in the refrigerator on its own. Strain out the solids first. The method for the ferment itself, with the 3% brine chart, is on the Fermented Cherry Tomatoes with Garlic and Shallots recipe sheet.