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Orange tomatoes healthier than red

Fruit's antioxidant is easier to absorb, OSU scientist finds

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When it comes to tomatoes, cancer researchers have preached "the redder, the better."

But now Ohio State University scientists say that the lighter-skinned tangerine tomatoes top their red counterparts. Why? The cancerfighting lycopene they contain is more easily absorbed by your body.

Lycopene absorption from the tangerine tomatoes was 2 1/2 times higher than that absorbed from typical red tomato varieties.

"That's what is so dramatic," said **Steven Schwartz, an Ohio State food chemist and toxicologist** who is head of the research project.

Lycopenes are antioxidants abundant in tomatoes, watermelons, pink grapefruit and other red fruits and vegetables.

Nonred tomatoes, including the tangerine, never really figured into lycopene research.

Tangerine tomatoes have been sold by a number of seed companies for years.

"This is a really interesting finding, and perhaps it can be used in breeding," said Grace Romero, director of research at Burpee, the Pennsylvaniabased seed company.

The new study grew out of a discovery made several years ago by Schwartz and other researchers that our blood contains an abundance of a type of lycopene called cis-lycopene.

Cis-lycopenes are found in tangerine tomatoes. Trans-lycopenes are found in red tomatoes.

"That's why we got interested ... we want to know if there's any physiological significance to these various (forms)," Schwartz said.

The OSU study compared lycopene absorption in 12 adults who ate a red tomato sauce and a tangerine tomato sauce.

Despite having fewer lycopenes, tangerine tomatoes far outshined the red variety in terms of lycopene absorption.

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- Ripe with lycopene

The study was published in the February issue of the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry.

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