

Day 99 | Friday, 26 June 2020... **From the Church Mouse**

Chickpeas are the most sought-after legume in the world. In fact, they are used in various cuisines including in the Middle East, India, Israel, Spain, and North Africa. This ancient bean has its origins in the Middle East where it was cultivated as early 7,500 years ago. Today, chickpeas have become an essential ingredient in many household kitchens. Also called garbanzo beans and Ceci, chickpeas are small in size. They are usually available in dry form and must be soaked and cooked before consumption. In modern times, chickpeas can be consumed from a can, ground up into a flour, stewed or even pureed.

When cooked, chickpeas have a grainy texture and nutty taste, making them an excellent accompaniment with many other foods. Apart from being very tasty, chickpeas are rich in fiber, minerals, and vitamins. They offer many health benefits like reducing risk factors to diseases, weight management, and improving digestion. Chickpeas are also very high in plant-based protein. This makes them one of the best meat replacement ingredients. Chickpeas are an essential ingredient in vegan and vegetarian diets.

### **This Tomato-Chickpea Salad Is the Taste of Summer**

The tomatoes in New York are starting to get pretty good, and while they're not quite the juicy yum bombs of July, they're finally tasty enough to hold their own next to chickpeas in a soft, juicy, herb-filled salad.

The key to coaxing a tomato's best flavor is to season it separately and let it marinate a little, before adding the rest of the salad ingredients.

To make enough salad for two, cut one large or two small tomatoes into bite-size chunks and put them in a bowl. Add salt, pepper, and a grated garlic clove, if you like, and toss gently but thoroughly. Let sit for 15 minutes or so, then taste. Does it lack brightness? Add a tangy acid, like lime juice, lemon juice or sherry vinegar. Could it use a little sweetness? Drizzle in a syrupy balsamic vinegar or pomegranate molasses instead. Or use one of the tangy acids, along with a sprinkle of sugar or drop of honey to balance it.

While the tomatoes are marinating, you could quickly pickle some onions. Slice up a red onion (or a few shallots) and put the slices in a bowl. Add enough lemon or lime juice to coat the slices well, a pinch of salt and two large pinches of sugar. Let sit for 10 to 30 minutes. The longer the onion slices sit, the pinker, more supple, and more pickled they become. Leftovers will keep in the fridge for at least a week.

Now, back to your tomato: Add about 2 cups (or the drained contents of a 15-ounce can) cooked chickpeas (or white beans), a handful of torn or chopped fresh herbs (basil and mint are nice), a pinch of red-pepper flakes and a shower of olive oil. Toss in some of the pickled onions if you're using them. Season with more salt and pepper. Add some acid, to taste, if you did not use the pickled onions.

Garnish this with flaky sea salt and cracked black pepper for a little crunch. Or for something even crispier, serve the salad with buttered crackers on the side. If you can, savor this meal outside, which is always the best way to celebrate the beginning of tomato season.

Gracious God who provides for our needs, thank you for our daily food and drink. We are so blessed with wonderful variety from which to make our meals. Your creation is wonderful and bountiful. We who are blessed need to share with those who are not as fortunate as us. Lord, hear our prayers. Amen