

# *Unda Unda! An Italian Tomato*



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**So often in my social situations** the subject of tomatoes comes up. I guess I have a reputation. Such was the case at a recent soirée when the talk turned to tomato recipes. Deanna, whom you might know as the manager of our tropical plant department, has Italian ancestry on both sides of her family, and tomatoes are central to their cooking. Her mother taught her a recipe that she excitedly shared with me. It's called "Unda Unda" which translates to "It's in there." That's what her mother told her. You start by dicing tomatoes into a bowl, being careful not to let any juices escape. Add a generous amount of gritty sea salt. (These old pass-along recipes never use measurements. Just feel your way through it.) Mix the tomatoes and salt thoroughly, the salt then works to release the tomato flavor. Next add diced green bell pepper, onion (small pieces, but not diced), fresh ground pepper, oregano, and garlic powder. Blend together. Do not refrigerate. When you're ready to serve, cut up some basil and distribute it liberally. Drizzle extra virgin olive oil over the completed salad. Prepare to be amazed.



## Unda Unda

Deanna says she incorporates Unda Unda into every meal, and in between. Put it on an omelette, add it to a sandwich, use it on pasta, or as a topping for snack crackers. Use your imagination. Deanna's family hails from Calabrese, Italy. That's the toe of the boot. I'm not sure if the recipe goes back to the old country, but let's assume it does. All the more charming. Of course there are endless variations to the recipe. Deanna herself likes to add avocado and feta cheese. I could see artichokes, olives, and mozzarella, and probably more. Have fun with it.



**Axil to be removed**



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I'm frequently asked about tomato pruning. (This refers to indeterminate (vine) tomatoes only. Determinate (bush) tomatoes should not be pruned.) Pruning involves removing the axils, also called suckers. This is the growth that emerges along the main stem, just above a side branch. I've never come across any proof of why this is a good thing. You'd think with this being such a common practice, someone would have done a side-by-side comparison with pruned and unpruned plants, measuring the subsequent fruit production. If they have, I haven't seen it. Some say pruning forces the tomato to grow taller quickly, and somehow that results in increased production. Most years I remove the axils until the first flowers appear. This year I decided not to prune at all, just to see if there's a noticeable difference. I reasoned that the plant gets all its energy from its roots and from its leaves, via photosynthesis. If you remove leaves, the plant would have less energy. I'm sure I'll have plenty of tomatoes no matter what.

Please email me ([kevin@milaegers.com](mailto:kevin@milaegers.com)) with your questions and comments!

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