

BAKED TOMATOES WITH CRUSTY BREAD

SERVES 8 (SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 HR

The brown sugar in the ingredients list below is there to mellow the acidity of the tomatoes, not to make this a sweet dish. Use a sturdy bakery loaf of white sandwich bread, not the packaged sliced stuff, for the topping. You will get enormous pleasure from serving people this dish.

- 3 (28-oz) cans whole tomatoes in juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ stick unsalted butter, divided
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground allspice
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme

- 1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar, or to taste
- 8 ($\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick) slices good-quality white sandwich bread such as a pullman loaf

► Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in middle. Butter a 3-quart baking dish (about 13 by 9 by 2 inches).
► Drain tomatoes, reserving 1 cup juice, then chop.
► Heat 2 tablespoons butter in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot over medium-high heat until foam subsides, then cook onions with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, stirring occasionally, until golden-brown, about 10 minutes. Add garlic, allspice, and cloves and cook, stirring, 1 minute. ► Stir in tomatoes with reserved juice, thyme, brown sugar, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper and briskly simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 20 minutes. ► Meanwhile, melt remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ stick butter and brush onto both sides of bread. Halve each slice. ► Transfer tomato mixture to baking dish and top with bread, overlapping slightly. Bake until bubbling and bread is crisp and golden-brown, about 20 minutes. >

For generations, scalloped (baked) tomatoes have appeared on southern tables in high summer, when the tomatoes are abundant and juicy.

