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Making and Canning (or freezing) Homemade Salsa from Fresh Tomatoes!

Making and canning your own salsa is something families remember years later. No store bought salsa, even if it is shipped from Texas, compares with the taste of that made from your own tomatoes from your garden or fresh-picked from a local farm! In the middle of the winter, you can have tortilla chips and your salsa and taste the summer flavor of fresh tomatoes.

Here's how to do it, in easy steps and completely illustrated. This method is so easy, ANYONE can do this! It's a great thing to do with your kids!

Ingredients and Equipment

- Tomatoes - about 15 lbs (yes, quite a few - you remove the skins, seeds and a lot of the water, so it takes a lot to start.) You'll need about 3 quarts of prepared chopped tomatoes. This makes about 8 pints of salsa! [If you only want to make a single jar, see this page instead!](#)
- Salsa mix or your own seasonings. The Ball salsa mix sells for about \$2.00 to \$4.00 per packet. A packet will make about a 7 pint jars. See step 7 below for seasonings.
- 2 cups Lemon juice (if you make your own seasoning) or vinegar (if you use the Ball or Mrs. Wages mixes)
- 1 Water bath Canner (a huge pot to sterilize the jars after filling (about \$30 to \$35 - \$30 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores. Note: we sell canners, supplies and kits through our affiliates: [click here](#) or see the bottom of this page) Tomatoes are on the border between the high-acid fruits that can be preserved in a boiling-water bath and the low-acid fruits, vegetables and meats that need pressure canning
- Pint canning jars (Ball or Kerr jars can be found at Publix, Kroger, Safeway and local "big box" stores - about \$8 per dozen jars including the lids and rings). Be sure to get wide mouth jars to fit the pickles in! Pint size works best!
- Lids - thin, flat, round metal lids with a gum binder that seals them against the top of the jar. They may only be used once.
- Rings - metal bands that secure the lids to the jars. They may be reused many times.
- Jar grabber (to pick up the hot jars)
- Lid lifter (has a magnet to pick the lids out of the boiling water where you sterilize them. (\$2 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores, but it's usually cheaper online from our affiliates)
- 1 large pot.
- Large spoons and ladles
- Jar funnel (\$3-Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes even hardware stores)

Process - How to Make salsa from Fresh Tomatoes

Step 1 - Selecting the tomatoes

It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality tomatoes!

At right is a picture of tomatoes from my garden - they are so much better than anything from the grocery store. And if you don't have enough, a pick-you-own farm is the place to go! At right are 4 common varieties that will work:



Top left: Beefsteak Top right: Lemon Boy, yellow
Bottom left: Roma, paste-type Bottom right: Better Boy



The picture at left shows the best variety of tomato to use: Roma; also called paste tomatoes. they have fewer sides, thicker, meatier walls, and less water.

Also, you don't want mushy, bruised or rotten tomatoes!

Step 2 - Removing the tomato skins

Here's a trick you may not know: put the tomatoes, a few at a time in a large pot of boiling water for no more than 1 minute (30 - 45 seconds is usually enough)

then....



Plunge them into a waiting bowl of ice water.

This makes the skins slide right off of the tomatoes! If you leave the skins in, they become tough and chewy in the sauce, not very pleasant.

Step 3 -Removing seeds and water

After you have peeled the skins off the tomatoes, cut the tomatoes in half. Now we need to remove the seeds and excess water.



Step 4 - Squeeze of the seeds and water

Just like it sounds: wash your hands then squeeze each tomato and use your finger or a spoon to scoop and shake out most of the seeds. You don't need to get fanatical about it; removing just most will do.

Step 5 - Drain and dice the tomatoes

Toss the squeezed (Squozen? :) tomatoes into a colander or drainer, while you work on others. This helps more of the water to drain off. You may want to save the liquid: if you then pass it through a sieve, screen or cheesecloth, you have fresh tomato juice; great to drink cold or use in cooking!

Next chop them up - I like 1/2 inch size cubes. You'll need about 3 quarts of peeled, cored, chopped tomatoes



Step 6 - Get the jars and lids sterilizing

The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sterilize" cycle. I get that going while I'm preparing everything else, so it's done by the time I'm ready to fill the jars.

Be sure to let it go through the rinse cycle to get rid of any soap!



Lids: Put the lids into a pan of boiling water for at least several minutes.

Note: everything gets sterilized in the water bath (step 7) anyway, so this just helps to ensure there is no spoilage later!)



Step 7 - Prepackaged mix or your own seasoning?

Either works equally well. The salsa mix for canning has the advantage of being tested and easy. It's basically corn starch, onion powder, salt and seasoning. It doesn't have any preservative to improve the canning, so the advantage is only that it is easier. However, I like my custom-made from fresh seasonings better, so here is the recipe for that:

I use an electric chopper (food processor) to dice the seasonings fairly fine, about 1/8 inch cubes.

- 3 cups chopped onions
- 6 jalapeño peppers, seeded, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 12-ounce cans tomato paste (adds body)
- 2 cups bottled lemon or lime juice
- 1 tablespoon salt (optional)
- 1 tablespoon sugar (optional - you use Splenda if you are on a sugar-restricted diet)
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin (optional)
- 2 tablespoons oregano leaves (optional)



Either works fine!



Step 8 - Mix ingredients in the pot and bring the sauce to a gentle simmer

<-- Start with the chopped tomatoes in the pot...

Add the seasonings and bring to a gentle simmer, just to get it hot (180 F, if you have a thermometer) there's no need to cook it; only to get it hot enough to ready it for water bath processing to kill any bacteria and enzymes.. Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.



Taste it as it cooks. If you like the sauce hotter, add 1 teaspoon of chili powder.



Step 9 - Fill the jars with sauces and put the lid and rings on

Fill them to within ¼-inch of the top, seat the lid and hand-tighten the ring around them.

Be sure the contact surfaces (top of the jar and underside of the ring) are clean to get a good seal!

Step 10 - Boil the jars in the canner

Put them in the canner and keep them covered with at least 1 to 2 inches of water. Keep the water boiling. Process the jars in a boiling-water bath for:

Recommended process time for Tomato/Tomato Paste Salsa in a boiling-water canner.

		Process Time at Altitudes of		
Style of Pack	Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Pints or 8 oz jars	15 min	20	25

IMPORTANT:

The USDA says the only change you can safely make in this salsa recipe is to change the amount of spices and herbs. Do not alter the proportions of vegetables to acid and tomatoes because it might make the salsa unsafe. Do not substitute vinegar for the lemon juice.

I prefer a pressure canner or a taller water bath canner, shown at right - To order one, see the bottom of this page or [Canning supplies!](#)



Step 9 - Done

Lift the jars out of the water and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight). You can then remove the rings if you like. Once the jars are cool, you can check that they are sealed verifying that the lid has been sucked down. Just press in the center, gently, with your finger. If it pops up and down (often making a popping sound), it is not sealed. If you put the jar in the refrigerator right away, you can still use it. Some people replace the lid and reprocess the jar, then that's a bit iffy. If you heat the contents back up, re-jar them (with a new lid) and the full time in the canner, it's usually ok.



Adapted from the USDA/UGa [National Center for Home Food Preservation's recipe](#)

Other Equipment:

From left to right:

1. Jar lifting tongs
to pick up hot jars
2. Lid lifter
- to remove lids from the pot
of boiling water
(sterilizing)
3. Lid
- disposable - you may
only use them once
4. Ring
- holds the lids on the jar
until after
the jars cool - then you
don't need them
5. Canning jar funnel
- to fill the jars



Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Salsa - makes 9 pints				
Item	Quantity	Cost in 2009	Source	Subtotal
Tomatoes	15 to 20 lbs (to make about 12 cups (3 quarts) of prepared tomato)	free from the garden, or \$0.50 cents at a PYO	Garden	\$0.00
Canning jars (pint size, wide mouth), includes lids and rings	9 jars	\$8.00/dozen	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores	\$6.00
seasonings	See step 7	\$2.00?	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores	\$2.00
OR Salsa mix	1 packet	\$4.00 per package	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores	
Total				\$8.00 total or about \$0.95 per pint INCLUDING the jars - which you can reuse!