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Making and Canning (or freezing) Homemade Spaghetti Sauce from Fresh Tomatoes, with a water bath canner

Making and canning your own spaghetti sauce is something families remember years later. No store bought spaghetti sauce 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 make a meal with your spaghetti sauce and taste the summer flavor of fresh tomatoes. This recipe is for spaghetti sauce WITHOUT meat, so you can use a water bath canner or a pressure canner. The USDA does not have a recipe for spaghetti sauce for a water bath canner (they only have one for a pressure canner, it's a bit different; if you have a pressure canner, you may want to [see this page for spaghetti sauce using a pressure canner](#)), but both the prepackage season mixes (like Ball's, Mrs. Wages) and the Ball Blue book do have a water bath canner version. The homemade version (Ball), which they call "seasoned tomato sauce" requires the addition of lemon juice (not vinegar) to help acidify it.

You can add meats, but that requires a pressure canner and a different set of directions ([see this page for directions for spaghetti sauce with meat](#)) And [if you only want to make 1 quart of spaghetti sauce, see this page instead.](#)

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!

I've added [free labels for your jars here](#), in a Word format! Just download, edit, and print in label paper.

Ingredients

Yield: 7 pints

- **Tomatoes** - about 20 lbs (yes, you need a big basketful - you remove the skins, seeds and a lot of the water, so it takes a lot to start.)
- **Spaghetti sauce mix or your own seasonings.** The Mrs. Wages, Ball or Harvest spaghetti sauce 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 making your own seasonings.

Equipment

- **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 many sizes and types of canners for all types of stoves and needs - see [canning supplies](#)). 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 Pint size works best, but quarts are allowed, too, since the pressure canner will thoroughly heat them.!
 - **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)
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Process - How to Make Spaghetti Sauce 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 right shows the best variety of tomato to use: Roma; also called paste tomatoes. They have fewer sides, thicker, meatier walls, and less water. And that means thicker sauce in less cooking time!

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 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! By draining the water off now, you'll end up with a thicker spaghetti sauce in less cooking time! And that preserves vitamins (and your sanity).

FYI, the 20 pounds of raw, fresh, whole tomatoes you started with should produce about 7 - 9 pints of "squeezed" 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. Mix or your own seasoning?

Either works equally well. The spaghetti sauce mix (see the Amazon.com box below) for canning has the advantage of being tested and VERY easy to use. It's basically a type of corn starch, onion powder, salt and seasoning. It doesn't have any preservative to improve the canning, so the advantage is just that it is easier and safe. Remember, this recipe is for NO meat! ([see this page for directions for spaghetti sauce with meat](#))

Otherwise, this slightly modified version of the Ball Blue Book recipes works well:

2 cups chopped fresh onions (then sauté or microwave them until they are soft)	3 Tablespoons of oregano
3 clove of garlic, minced	3 bay leaves
2 Tablespoons diced, fresh OR dried basil	1/4 teaspoon black pepper
2 tablespoons chopped celery (optional, may be too strong for some folk's tastes)	2 Tablespoons chopped red sweet peppers
2 teaspoon salt (optional - I don't put any in!)	1/4 cup lemon juice (helps to acidify it, not necessary if you have a pressure canner)
	1/4 cup red wine (optional) I think a little burgundy makes it!

And if you like your spaghetti sauce thick, add either tomato paste - 1 or 2 small cans should do it,

A note about spices: Less spice, especially garlic and onions in canned sauce is better. They tend to strengthen and sometimes become bitter in storage. So use less when you prepare the sauce and add more when you actually use it, if you want!

Step 8 - Combine and bring the sauce to a gentle simmer

Combine the tomatoes and spices together in a big pot. There's generally no need to add liquid, most types of tomatoes have so much water, we will need to boil it down to drive off much of the water to thicken the sauce. If your tomatoes are watery, boil it down *before* you add the spices, to avoid them becoming too strong.



You don't need to overcook it; just bring it to boiling to sterilize it, mix the seasonings and cook down the tomatoes.

As they cook, the tomatoes will fall apart into sauce with out much need of mushing!

Step 9 - Fill the jars with sauce 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.

NOTE: if you want to freeze the sauce instead, just fill your freezer containers (I like Ziploc freezer bags in the quart size), fill them completely, eliminate air pockets, seal them and pop them in the freezer. You're done!



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



Step 10 - Process (Boil) the jars in the canner

Put them in the canner and keep them covered with at least 1 inch of water. Keep the water boiling. Process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 35 minutes for pints and 40 minutes for quarts. This processing time is based on the Ball Blue Book's "Seasoned Tomato Sauce" recipe which is very similar (our recipe is actually more conservative, using less non-acidic ingredients).

Of course, if you use a packet of spaghetti sauce canning mix, follow the processing times in their directions.



If you have a pressure canner, use it and process the sauce for the time in the tables below, as appropriate for your altitude, jar size and type of canner. Note that these times are from the USDA's recipe which is slightly different, but since the Ball recipe is safe in a pressure canner, this should work in a pressure canner.



Table 1. Recommended process time for **Spaghetti Sauce Without Meat** in a dial-gauge pressure canner.

			Canner Gauge Pressure (PSI) at Altitudes of			
Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time	0 - 2,000 ft	2,001 - 4,000 ft	4,001 - 6,000 ft	6,001 - 8,000 ft
Hot	Pints	20 min	11 lb	12 lb	13 lb	14 lb
	Quarts	25	11	12	13	14

Table 2. Recommended process time for **Spaghetti Sauce Without Meat** in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.

			Canner Gauge Pressure (PSI) at Altitudes of	
Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time	0 - 1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Hot	Pints	20 min	10 lb	15 lb
	Quarts	25	10	15

The processing times in a pressure canner are adapted from the "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 1994, Reviewed June 2006.

Pressure canners work better for tomatoes and other low acid foods - you'll get less spoilage with a pressure canner.

I prefer a pressure canner (see photo below) or a larger 33 quarter water bath canner, shown at right - it is much deeper, so it is neater, no boilovers, and allows you to cover the tallest jars with several inches of water to ensure safety! To order one, click on [Canning supplies](#) and select the canner that is right for your stove (regular or flat bottomed for glass or ceramic stoves)



Step 11 - 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.

Frequently Asked Questions about making tomato sauce - [Click here](#)

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



Home Canning Kits

This is the same type of standard canner that my grandmother used to make everything from applesauce to jams and jellies to tomato and spaghetti sauce. This complete kit includes everything you need and lasts for years: the canner, jar rack, jar grabber tongs, lid lifting wand, a plastic funnel, labels, bubble freer, and the bible of canning, the Ball Blue Book. It's much cheaper than buying the items separately. You'll never need anything else except jars & lids! To see [more canners, of different styles, makes and prices, click here!](#) For more information and current pricing:



[Click here for a larger photo, more information, pricing, ordering, etc.](#)

Average Customer Review: ★★★★★

Usually ships in 1-2 business days

Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Spaghetti Sauce - makes 7 pint jars, 16 oz each*				
Item	Quantity	Cost in 2009	Source	Subtotal
Tomatoes	20 - 25 lbs (to make about 16 cups 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	7 jars	\$8.00/dozen	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores	\$4.50
seasoning	See step 7	\$2.00?	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores	\$2.00
Spaghetti mix	1 packet	\$3.00 per package	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores	
Total				\$6.50 total or about \$0.95 per jar INCLUDING the jars - which you can reuse!

* - This assumes you already have the pots, pans, ladles, and reusable equipment. Note that you can reuse the jars! Many products are sold in jars that will take the lids and rings for canning. For example, Classico Spaghetti sauce is in quart sized jars that work with Ball and Kerr lids and rings. Note that the Classico's manufacturer does not recommend reuse of their jars: [see what they have to say on this page:](#)

Answers to Common Questions

What did I do wrong if my jars spoil?

Tomatoes are a low acid fruit - adding lemon juice helps, processing at least 35 minutes in the water bath canner, or better still, using a pressure canner almost eliminates spoilage. If you don't have a pressure canner, you must boost the acid level of the sauce, by adding 2 tablespoons of lemon juice or 1/2 teaspoon of citric acid per quart of sauce.

The question everyone asks: Can you add meat?

With a water bath canner, absolutely, definitely NOT. The temperatures do not get high enough to kill the type of bacteria that can attack meat and make you sick, or even kill you. However, with a pressure canner, it IS possible. I have complete directions here! I don't do it, simply because... have you ever tasted canned meat? Yes, it is called SPAM. My recommendation is to can without the meat and add fresh browned ground meat or meatballs when you use the sauce!

I have read in other homemade spaghetti sauce recipes that you need to cook the mixture for at least 4-5 hours. Is this necessary?

I suppose if you really want to make sure that absolutely no vitamins survive, you could cook it that long! :) The only reason people used to tomato sauce that long was the Roma paste-type tomatoes, with thicker walls, meatier with fewer seeds and less water didn't exist, so they had to cook it for hours to get rid of water and thicken it. And of course, modern sauce mixes that contain a little bit of corn starch as a thickener, also help shorten the time.

And for those who want to go strictly organic and au naturale, my method of squeezing out the excess water and seeds eliminates much of the excess juice (which you can save as tomato juice for drinking) and lets you start with a thicker tomato pulp which means much shorter cooking time!