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## Making and Canning (or freezing) Homemade Spicy / Zesty Salsa from Fresh Tomatoes!

Making and canning your own salsa is something families remember years later. This zesty recipe includes cilantro for that fresh kick! 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!

Yield: 6 pint jars

### Ingredients

- Tomatoes - 10 cups peeled, cored, chopped tomatoes, which takes about about 8 lbs (yes, quite a few - you remove the skins, seeds and a lot of the water, so it takes a lot to start.) This makes about 6 pints of salsa! [If you only want to make a single jar, see this page instead!](#)
- 4 to 5 cups seeded, chopped long green chile peppers (about 2 lbs worth - less if you want a milder salsa)
- 1/4 cup seeded, chopped jalapeno peppers
- 5 cups chopped onions (about 1.5 lbs)
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1.5 cups cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin\*

- 1 tablespoon oregano leaves\*
- 2 or 3 tablespoons fresh cilantro\*
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt

## 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 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)

## Directions - Step by Step

IMPORTANT: Follow the directions carefully for each recipe. Use the amounts of each vegetable listed in the recipe. Add the amount of vinegar listed. You may change the amount of spices, if desired. Do not can salsas that do not follow these or other research tested recipes. (They may be frozen or stored in the refrigerator). Do not thicken salsas with flour or cornstarch before canning. After you open a jar to use, you may pour off some of the liquid, add tomato paste or thicken with cornstarch.

### 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  
Bottom left: Roma, paste-type

Top right: Lemon Boy, yellow  
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 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. Make your own seasonings?

I use an electric chopper (food processor) to dice the seasonings fairly fine,



about 1/8 inch cubes.

- 4 to 5 cups seeded, chopped long green chile peppers (about 2 lbs worth - less if you want a milder salsa)
- 1/4 cup seeded, chopped jalapeno peppers
- 5 cups chopped onions (about 1.5 lbs)
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1.5 cups cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin\* optional
- 1 tablespoon oregano leaves\* optional
- 2 or 3 tablespoons fresh cilantro\* optional
- 1 and 1/2 teaspoons salt\* optional
- Chili powder or hot sauce - 1 teaspoon \* optional

\* Optional Spices: The optional spices add flavoring to salsas. The amounts of spices and herbs may be altered in these recipes. Cilantro and cumin are often used in spicy salsas. You may leave them out if you prefer a salsa with a milder taste. For a stronger cilantro flavor, add fresh cilantro just before serving the salsa.

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/boil, 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 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.



[www.org/salsa\\_withcilantro.htm](http://www.org/salsa_withcilantro.htm)

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 - 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 pint (or smaller) jars in a boiling-water bath for

- 15 minutes at 0-1,000 feet altitude;
- 20 minutes if you are at 1,001-6,000 feet; OR
- 25 minutes if you are above 6,000 feet.



This document was adapted from the "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 1994.

Reviewed June 2006.

### 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.



Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Zesty Salsa - makes 9 pints				
Item	Quantity	Cost in 2009	Source	Subtotal
Tomatoes	10 lbs (to make about 4 cups (2 quarts) of prepared tomato)	free from the garden, or \$0.50 cents at a PYO	Garden	\$0.00
Canning jars (pint size or 8 ounce size), includes lids and rings	4 pint jars or 8 eight-ounce jars	\$8.00/dozen	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores	\$3.00
seasonings	See step 7	\$2.00?	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores	\$2.00
Total				\$5.00 total or about \$1.25 per pint 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

## 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. (or half that, for pint jars)

Can I can my own salsa recipe?

Probably not. According to the USDA's National Center for Home Food Preservation:

"Salsas are usually mixtures of acid and low-acid ingredients; they are an example of an acidified food. The specific recipe, and sometimes preparation method, will determine if a salsa can be processed in a boiling water canner or a pressure canner. A process must be scientifically determined for each recipe. "

The USDA does accept that if you take an approved, tested recipe and make minor alterations to ingredients that does affect the preserving properties, that should be ok. But there are a lot of if's in that statement. For example, substituting 1 teaspoon of ground chili spice for 1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper is probably fine, but substituting 1 cup of apple juice for 1 cup of lemon juice would not be. Unless you really know what you're doing, you should probably stick to the approved recipes. The preserving recipes I publish, like the one above, are all from the USDA, universities or established canning authorities.

Here are some Salsa Guidelines from Penn State University:

- Do not substitute vinegar for lemon juice, but you can substitute lemon juice for vinegar. Lemon juice is more acidic.
- Do not reduce the amount of lemon juice or tomatoes.

- Do not add extra peppers, onion, or garlic. You can reduce the amount of peppers, onion, or garlic.
- Canned chilies may be used in place of fresh.
- You can substitute one type of pepper for another. For example, hot jalapeno peppers, bell peppers, yellow peppers, banana peppers, chili peppers and cubinal peppers may all be substituted 1 for 1.
- The key is not not increasing the amount of low acid ingredients in relation to the amount of high acid ingredients

My question is about salsa. I was going to borrow a pressure cooker to make salsa this year (for the first time). My grandma told me that I didn't need the pressure cooker, I could just make salsa using the "inversion" method like I did the blueberry jam. Can I do this?

Well, Grandma may be sweet, but a lot of her generation died of cancer from smoking, heart attacks from eating too much saturated fat... And food poisoning! :) Jam should get 5 minutes in the boiling water bath, too.

Tomatoes have enough acid to require only a water bath for processing; but by the time you add the other ingredients which have no acidity, you've got a food that can spoil easily. That's why most salsa recipes include a couple of cups of vinegar or lemon juice (both very acidic).

Even so, a pressure canner affords greater safety than a boiling water bath, and is more versatile. But if you follow my recipe and use vinegar or lemon juice as stated in the recipe, the boiling water bath will work fine.

And let Grandma make the cookies rather than the preserves! :)