



Home Canned Salsas

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Salsas are very popular and may outrank ketchup in sales of condiments. Salsas can be made fresh at home and used immediately or stored in the refrigerator for a short time. However, when homemade salsas are canned it is very important to use a tested recipe and process them correctly to destroy the bacteria that can cause botulism—a dangerous food poisoning. Follow the recipe instructions exactly and do not alter the proportions of ingredients. Adding extra vegetables to the ingredients or reducing the volume by overcooking can make the salsa unsafe. The acidity of the mixture must remain at a safe level for the processing method and time given in the recipe. A tart flavor does not guarantee that the acidity is high enough. It is also unsafe to add starch or cornstarch to thicken the mixture before canning.

The texture and flavor of salsas may vary depending upon the ingredients and spices used. Salsas usually are a combination of tomatoes, peppers, onions, garlic, acid, salt and spices. Red or green tomatoes may be used. Tomatillos (Mexican husk tomatoes) may be used in some recipes. Different types of peppers may be used, from mild green chiles for a milder product to serrano or jalapeno peppers for a hotter product. However, the proportion or amount of peppers called for in a recipe should not be changed.

An acid ingredient, usually vinegar or lemon juice, is critical to the safety of the canned product. Without the addition of acid, the product would have to be processed in a pressure canner and not in a boiling water canner. It is unsafe to substitute an equal amount of vinegar for lemon juice when the recipe calls for lemon juice, because lemon juice is more acidic than 50-grain vinegar. It is safe to substitute lemon juice for vinegar. Use only vinegar with at least 5 percent acidity (50-grain) or bottled lemon juice.

Selecting Tomatoes

Use only firm, ripe tomatoes with no disease spots. Do not use tomatoes from dead or frost-killed vines. Green tomatoes are more acidic than red tomatoes and can be substituted for red tomatoes. Tomatillos also may be

substituted for red tomatoes. Some people prefer paste type tomatoes such as Roma because they are firmer and make the salsa thicker than slicing tomatoes do.

Working with Chile Peppers

Most peppers should be peeled before they are used to make salsa. (Some young, tender chilies may not have to be peeled.) To peel peppers, wash and dry them and make a small slit in the side of each pepper so steam can escape. Then blister the peppers with a heat source to make peeling easier. You can put them in an oven (400 degrees F) or broiler for 6 to 8 minutes until skins blister, or you can cover a burner with heavy wire mesh and place chilies on the burner for several minutes.

Turn peppers frequently to prevent scorching and ensure even blistering. Remove peppers from the heat and allow them to cool. For easier peeling, place peppers in a pan and cover them with a damp towel for a few minutes. When cool, slip off skins, discard seeds and chop peppers.

Be careful when working with chile peppers. Wear rubber gloves and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your face or eyes. The volatile oils in hot peppers can cause severe chemical burns.

Chili Salsa

(makes 6 to 8 pints)

5 pounds tomatoes (3 quarts chopped)
2 pounds peppers (2 quarts chopped)
1 pound onion (2 1/2 cups chopped)
1 cup vinegar (5%)
1 tablespoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper

Peel chiles as directed above. Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30-60 seconds or until skins split. Dip in cold water, slip off skins, and remove cores. Coarsely chop tomatoes, peppers and onions. Mix all ingredients together in a large saucepan. Heat to boiling, then simmer for 10 minutes. Fill pint jars, leaving 1/2 inch of space at the top. Put on lids and process in a boiling water canner:

15 minutes for altitudes of 0 to 1000 feet
20 minutes for altitudes of 1001 to 6000 feet
25 minutes for altitudes above 6000 feet

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Variations: For a milder salsa use more bell and Anaheim peppers, and for a hotter salsa use more of the small chile and jalapeno peppers.

Tomatillo Green Salsa

(makes 5 pints)

5 cups chopped tomatillos, outer husks removed
1 1/2 cups seeded, chopped, long green chiles
1/2 cup seeded, finely chopped jalapeno peppers
4 cups chopped onions
1 cup bottled lemon juice
6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tablespoon ground cumin, optional
3 tablespoons oregano leaves, optional
1 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper

Combine all ingredients in a large saucepan and stir frequently over high heat until mixture begins to boil. Then reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Ladle hot mixture into pint jars, leaving 1/2 inch of space at the top. Put on lids and process in a boiling water canner:

15 minutes for altitudes of 0 to 1000 feet
20 minutes for altitudes of 1001 to 6000 feet
25 minutes for altitudes above 6000 feet

You may use green tomatoes in this recipe instead of tomatillos.

Tomato Salsa (using paste tomatoes)

(makes 13 pints)

7 quarts peeled, cored, chopped tomatoes
4 cups seeded, chopped, long green chiles
5 cups chopped onion
1/2 cup seeded, finely chopped jalapeno peppers
6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 cups bottled lemon juice
2 tablespoons salt
1 tablespoon black pepper
2 tablespoons ground cumin, optional
3 tablespoons oregano leaves, optional
2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, optional

Combine all ingredients except cumin, oregano and cilantro in a large pot and bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Then reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes. Add spices and simmer for another 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Ladle hot mixture into pint jars, leaving 1/2 inch of space at the top. Put on lids and process in a boiling water canner:

15 minutes for altitudes of 0 to 1000 feet
20 minutes for altitudes of 1001 to 6000 feet
25 minutes for altitudes above 6000 feet

This recipe works best with paste tomatoes. If you are using slicing tomatoes you will have to cook the salsa much longer to get a desirable consistency.

Tomato Taco Sauce

(makes 11 pints)

8 quarts peeled, cored, finely chopped paste tomatoes
2 cloves garlic, crushed
5 cups chopped onions
4 jalapeno peppers, seeded, chopped
4 long green chiles, seeded, chopped
2 1/2 cups vinegar
2 tablespoons salt
1 1/2 tablespoons black pepper
1 tablespoon sugar
2 tablespoons oregano leaves, optional
1 teaspoon ground cumin, optional

Combine ingredients in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, stirring frequently until thick (about 1 hour). Ladle hot mixture into pint jars, leaving 1/2 inch of space at the top. Put on lids and process in boiling water canner:

15 minutes for altitudes of 0 to 1000 feet
20 minutes for altitudes of 1001 to 6000 feet
25 minutes for altitudes above 6000 feet

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