



Salsa 101

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Be sure to make salsa by following a research-based recipe that includes processing in a water bath or atmospheric steam canner. The recipes included here are research based. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation about making salsa. Recommended research-based resources appear at the end of this fact sheet.

Salsa Ingredients

The ingredients for tomato salsa include tomatoes or other fruits, peppers, acid (vinegar, lemon, or lime juice), herbs and spices, and onions. When canning salsa and other tomato products, choose vine-ripened and disease-free tomatoes. Never use tomatoes from dead or frost-killed vines. They may be less acidic or can contain pathogens that may not be destroyed during the canning process.

Tomatoes or Other Fruit

Use the amount of tomatoes the recipe calls for. You can use or combine red, green, or heirloom tomatoes or tomatillos as long as the total amount of tomatoes remains the same. If other fruit is used, be sure to use the amount listed as well.

Peppers

Handle peppers with gloves. Choose only disease-free, unblemished, firm peppers. Use the amount of peppers the recipe calls for. *Never* increase the amount (cups or pounds) of peppers in a research-based recipe. You can substitute one type of pepper for another. For example, hot chiles can be substituted for bell peppers. You *can* substitute 1 cup green peppers for 1 cup jalapeños, but you *cannot* substitute 6 green peppers for 6 jalapeños because of their size difference. This size-difference substitution will result in a product with unsafe acidity content.

Acid

The acid ingredients of vinegar, lemon, or lime juice are necessary because the natural acid content of the mixture is not acidic enough to safely can the salsa in an atmospheric steam or water bath canner. Bottled commercial lemon or lime juice or vinegar with 5% acidity is required in research-based recipes. The amount of vinegar, lemon or lime juice in a research-based recipe *cannot* be reduced or increased, and the ingredients cannot be substituted for each other. If done, this could be life threatening!

Herbs and Spices

Herbs and spices add their own distinct flavor to salsas. You can increase or reduce the amount of *dried* herbs and spices as much as you desire, but the exact measurement of *fresh* herbs must be used. If you want a stronger cilantro flavor, add chopped fresh cilantro just before serving.



Onions

You may substitute red, yellow, or white onions for one another. *Do not increase the total amount of onions or other vegetables, such as corn or beans called for in the recipe. If you want to do this, add it to the salsa before serving.*

Keep in Mind

Always rinse your produce with cool, running water prior to use.

Never add thickeners. They impact the heat penetration during processing. For a thicker salsa, look for a research-based recipe that includes tomato paste.

Follow the processing method for the exact length of time specified in the research-based recipe.

It is not safe to can your own original salsa recipe. Refrigerate for up to one week or freeze it instead if you want to create your own recipe.

Never preserve in larger jars than the recipe calls for as the processing time is set for the jar size stated in the recipe. Using a larger jar could limit the heat penetration resulting in an unsafe product.

Never alter the processing time from the tested recipe.

Read more about salsa ingredients at the National Center for Home

Food Preservation website: https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa/salsa_ingredients.html

Before making salsa, read the National Center for Home Food Preservation's *Using Boiling Water Canners* for steps in managing the process: https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/using_bw_canners.html

Caution: While handling or cutting hot peppers, wear plastic or rubber gloves, and do not touch your face. If you do not wear gloves, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your face or eyes.



Recipes

Choice Salsa

6 cups peeled, cored, seeded, and chopped ripe tomatoes
9 cups diced onions and/or peppers of any variety
1½ cups commercially bottled lemon or lime juice
3 teaspoons canning or pickling salt

Yield: about 6-pint jars

Procedure:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Wash and rinse pint or half-pint canning jars. Keep hot in a pan of water, or you can wash and keep warm using your dishwasher until ready to fill.
- Prepare lids and ring bands according to manufacturer's directions.
- In a large pot, combine prepared ingredients.
- Add lemon or lime juice and salt.
- While stirring, bring to a boil over medium heat.
- Reduce heat and simmer salsa for an additional 3 minutes, stirring as needed to prevent scorching.
- Into clean, hot, prepared jars, place the hot salsa, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and re-adjust headspace to ½ inch. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel. Adjust lids and bands. Process in a water bath canner according to Table 1.
- Let cool, undisturbed, 12–24 hours, and check that your lids sealed. Remove rings, and label and date the jars of salsa.

(Recipe adapted from *Preparing and Canning Salsa: Choice Salsa*, National Center for Home Food Preservation. It was developed at the University of Georgia, Athens, and released by Elizabeth L. Andress, 2013.)

Tomato/Tomato Paste Salsa

3 quarts peeled, cored, chopped slicing tomatoes
3 cups chopped onions
6 jalapeño peppers, seeded, finely chopped
4 long green chiles, seeded, chopped
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
Two 12-ounce cans tomato paste
2 cups bottled lemon or lime juice
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon ground cumin
2 tablespoons oregano leaves (optional)
1 teaspoon black pepper

Yield: about 7 to 9 pints

Procedure:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Wash and rinse pint or half-pint canning jars. Keep hot in a pan of water, or you can wash and keep warm using your dishwasher until ready to fill.
- Prepare lids and ring bands according to manufacturer's directions.
- In a large saucepan, combine all ingredients and heat, stirring frequently, until mixture boils.
- Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Into clean, hot, prepared jars, place the hot salsa, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and re-adjust headspace to ½ inch. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel. Adjust lids and bands. Process in a water bath canner according to Table 1.
- Let cool, undisturbed, 12–24 hours, and check that your lids sealed. Remove rings, and label and date the jars of salsa.

(Recipe adapted from *Preparing and Canning Salsa: Tomato/Tomato Paste Salsa*, National Center for Home Food Preservation. The center's recipe was adapted from the United States Department of Agriculture's Complete Guide to Home Canning, revised 2015.)

Table 1. Recommended process time for included salsa recipes in a water bath 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	Half-pint or Pint Jars	15 min	20 min.	25 min.

Note, that processing times may vary for other salsa recipes. Refer to the processing time for each research-based recipe.

Water bath canning is similar to steam canning, but it is done in an atmospheric steam canner. However, the process times remain the same. To learn more about steam canning, refer to the Michigan Fresh fact sheet *Basics of Steam Canning*: https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/basics_of_steam_canning

To learn more about water bath canning, refer to the Michigan fresh fact sheet *Basics of Water Bath Canning*: https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/HNI117_water-bath-canning.pdf

References

National Center for Home Food Preservation. (2013). *Preparing and Canning Salsa: Choice Salsa*. https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa/choice_salsa.html

National Center for Home Food Preservation. (2015). *Preparing and Canning Salsa: Tomato/Tomato Paste Salsa*. https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa/tomato_tomato_paste_salsa.html

Resources

Michigan State University Extension Food Preservation website: https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_preservation/index

National Center for Home Food Preservation, *How Do I Can Salsa?* https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa.html

National Center for Home Food Preservation, *Ingredients for Salsa Recipes*: https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa/salsa_ingredients.html

National Center for Home Food Preservation, *Using Boiling Water Canners*: https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/using_bw_canners.html

United States Department of Agriculture, *Complete Guide to Home Canning*: https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html