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Salsa: From Garden to Table

Introduction

Americans have grown to love salsa. The sauce is healthy, easy to make, and flavorful. Cooks love to experiment with salsa recipes and may wish to preserve their winning combination by canning. Most salsa recipes are a mixture of low-acid foods (onions and peppers), with higher acid foods (tomatoes). Acid flavorings such as vinegar, lemon juice, or lime juice are also common additions. The type and amount of ingredients used in salsa, as well as the preparation methods, are important considerations in how salsa is canned. Improperly canned salsas, or other tomato-pepper combinations, have been implicated in more than one outbreak of botulism.

Important guidelines are provided for preparing safe, home-canned salsa. Use only research-tested recipes. Follow the directions carefully for each recipe. Use the amounts listed for each vegetable. Add the amount of vinegar or lemon juice stated. If desired, the amount of spices may be changed. Do not thicken salsas with flour or cornstarch before canning. Salsa can be thickened at the time of use.

Below are descriptions of ingredients that are used in the tested recipes that follow. These recipes have been tested to ensure that they contain enough

acid to be processed safely in a boiling water bath canner. If your personal favorite is not listed, it is best to eat it fresh. Untested, fresh salsa recipes can be stored up to several weeks in the refrigerator, or freeze it up to one year for longer storage.

Ingredients

Tomatoes

The type of tomato used affects the quality of salsas. Although slicing and paste tomatoes make good salsas, paste tomatoes (such as Roma) have firmer flesh and produce a thicker salsa, while slicing tomatoes usually yield a thinner, more watery salsa. Salsa can be thickened by adding tomato paste.

Use only high-quality tomatoes for canning salsa. Do not use overripe or spoiled tomatoes, or those from dead or frost-killed vines. Poor quality or overripe tomatoes will yield a very poor salsa and may cause spoilage. Where recipes call for peeled or skinned tomatoes, remove the skin by dipping tomatoes into boiling water for 30–60 seconds or until skins split. Dip in cold water, then slip off skins and remove cores and seeds. Green tomatoes may be substituted for tomatoes in any of these recipes.

Peppers

Peppers range from mild to fiery in taste. Use only high-quality peppers. *Do not increase the total*

amount of peppers in any recipe. However, one type of pepper may be substituted for another.

Mild peppers are usually 4 to 10 inches long and include Anaheim, Ancho, College, Colorado, and Hungarian Yellow Wax. Choose a mild pepper when the recipe calls for long green chilies.

Small, very hot peppers usually 1 to 3 inches long, provide a distinct taste to salsas. Jalapeno is the most popular hot pepper. Other varieties include Serrano, Cayenne, Habanero, and Tabasco. Use rubber gloves when cutting or dicing these peppers, as they cause extreme irritation to the skin. Do not touch your face, particularly the area around your eyes, when working with hot chilies. Bell peppers may be substituted for some or all of the long green chilies. Canned chilies may be used in place of fresh.

Skinning Peppers—Finely chopped and hot peppers, such as jalapeno, usually are not skinned, but the seeds in hot peppers are often removed. The skin of long green chilies may be tough and can be removed by heating the peppers. To peel, slit each pepper along the side to allow steam to escape. To blister skins to make them easier to peel, use one of the following two methods:

- **Range-top method**—Cover hot burner, either gas or electric, with a heavy wire mesh. Place peppers on burner (at least medium high, check to see what burner temperature works for peppers) for several minutes until skins blister.
- **Oven or broiler method**—Place peppers in a hot oven (400°F) or under a broiler for 6 to 8 minutes until skins blister.

After blistering, place peppers in a pan and cover with a damp cloth. This makes peeling the pepper easier. Cool several minutes. Slip off skins. Discard seeds and chop. ***Wear plastic or rubber gloves while handling hot chilies.***

Tomatillos

Tomatillos are also known as Mexican husk tomatoes. To use, remove the outer husk. They do not need to be peeled or seeded.

Acids

Acid must be added to canned salsas because the natural acidity may not be high enough. Commonly used acids in home canning are vinegar and lemon juice. Lemon juice is more acidic than vinegar, and has less effect on the product's flavor. Use only vinegar that is at least 5% acid. Use only bottled lemon juice. An equal amount of lemon juice may be safely substituted for vinegar. ***Do not substitute vinegar for lemon juice***, as this will result in a less acidic and potentially unsafe salsa.

Spices

The amount of spices and herbs may be altered in these recipes. Cilantro and cumin are often used in a spicy salsa. Do not use them if you prefer a milder tasting salsa. For a stronger cilantro flavor, add fresh cilantro just before serving.

Processing

Use a Boiling Water Bath Canner

1. Use a rack to keep jars from touching the canner bottom. This allows the heat to reach all sides of the filled jars.
2. Put jars into a canner that contains simmering hot water.
3. Add boiling water, if needed, to bring water 1–2 inches above the jar tops. ***Do not pour water directly on the jars.*** Place a tight-fitting cover on canner. If you use a pressure canner for water bath canning, leave the cover unfastened and the petcock open to prevent pressure buildup.
4. Bring water back to a rolling boil. Set timer for the recommended processing time. Watch closely to keep water boiling gently and steadily. Add boiling water, if necessary, to keep jars covered with boiling water.
5. Immediately after the timer sounds, remove jars from the canner. The food could spoil later if jars are left in hot water too long.

Cooling Jars

- Put jars on a rack or cloth so air can circulate freely around them.
- **Do not** use a fan to cool down canned salsa; also avoid cold drafts.
- **Do not** retighten metal bands after processing.

Testing for Seal

The day after canning, test each jar for a tight seal. Jars with flat metal lids are sealed if:

1. The lid has popped down in the center.
2. The lid does not move when pressed down.

Refrigerate unsealed jars and consume within one week. If a jar is not sealed, reprocess within 24 hours. When reprocessing, pour salsa from jar into a pan and heat to boiling, then pack into a clean, hot jar. Wipe jar rim clean. Use a new lid and screw on metal band, then process for full time listed.

Storing

Wipe jars. Label with the date and the contents. Remove the screw bands to avoid rust. Store jars in a cool, dark place. Heat, freezing temperatures, light, or dampness will decrease the quality and shelf life of canned food. For best quality and nutritive value, use within one year.

Before Using

Before opening each jar, look for bulging lids, leaks, or any unusual appearance of the food. After opening, check for off-odor, mold, or foam. If there is any sign of spoilage, destroy the salsa.

Tomatillo Green Salsa

Yields 5 pints

Ingredients

5 cups tomatillos, chopped (green tomatoes can be substituted)
 1½ cups long green chilies, seeded and chopped
 1/2 cup jalapeno peppers, seeded and finely chopped
 4 cups onions, chopped

1 cup bottled lemon juice
 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
 1 Tablespoon ground cumin (optional)
 1 Tablespoon salt
 3 Tablespoons oregano leaves (optional)
 1 teaspoon black pepper

Preparation

Combine all ingredients in a large saucepan and stir frequently over high heat until mixture begins to boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Ladle hot salsa into pint jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process in a boiling water canner 15 minutes at 0–1,000 feet altitude; 20 minutes at 1,001–6,000 feet altitude.

Chile Salsa (Hot Tomato-Pepper Sauce)

Yields 6-8 pints

Ingredients

5 pounds tomatoes
 1 cup vinegar (5 percent)
 2 pounds chile peppers
 3 teaspoons salt
 1 pound onions
 1/2 teaspoon pepper

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

Preparation

Wash and rinse canning jars; keep hot until ready to use. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's directions.

Preparing Peppers: Wash and dry chiles; slit each pepper along the side to allow steam to escape. Peel using one of these two methods to blister skins:

Oven or broiler method to blister skins—Place chiles in a hot oven (400°F) or broiler for 6 to 8 minutes until skins blister.

Range-top method to blister skins—Cover hot burner (either gas or electric) with heavy wire mesh. Place peppers on burner for several minutes until skins blister.

To peel, after blistering skins, place peppers in a pan and cover with a damp cloth. This will make peeling the peppers easier.

Cool several minutes; slip off skins. Discard seeds and chop. Peel, wash, and dice onions. Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Dip in cold water, slip off skins, and remove cores. Coarsely chop tomatoes.

Hot Pack: Combine prepared peppers, onions, and tomatoes and remaining ingredients in a large saucepan. Heat to boiling, then simmer 10 minutes. Fill hot jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel. Apply two-piece metal canning lids. Process in a boiling water canner according to the recommendations below.

Recommended process time for Chile 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	15 minutes	20 minutes	25 minutes

IMPORTANT:

The only changes you can safely make in this salsa recipe are to substitute bottled lemon juice for the vinegar and to change the amount of pepper and salt. Do not alter the proportions of vegetables to acid and tomatoes because it might make the salsa unsafe.

References

- So Easy to Preserve*. 5th ed. Cooperative Extension Service, The University of Georgia College of Agriculture, Athens College of Family and Consumer Sciences, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Bulletin 989 (revised 2006).
- Salsa Recipes for Canning*. Hillers, Val and Richard Dougherty, Washington State University Cooperative Extension. (1992; revised 2000).

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