

# Salsa: From Garden to Table

Revised by: **Lisa Barlage**, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences

Original authors: **Marisa Warrix**, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, retired, and **Pam Leong**, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, retired



Americans have grown to love salsa. The sauce is healthy, easy to make and flavorful. Cooks love to experiment with salsa recipes and

might wish to preserve their winning combination by canning. Most salsa recipes are a mixture of low-acid foods (onions and peppers) and 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. Home canners should use only research-tested recipes, follow the directions carefully for each recipe, use the amounts listed for each vegetable, and add the amount of vinegar or lemon juice stated. If desired, the amount of spices can be changed. Do not thicken salsas with flour or cornstarch before canning, as 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 frozen up to one year for longer storage.

## Ingredients

### Tomatoes

The type of tomato used affects the quality of the salsa. 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 might 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 can be substituted for another.

Mild peppers are usually 4–10 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 1–3 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 can be substituted for some or all of the long green chilies. Canned chilies can 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 can 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:



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- **Range-top method:** Cover hot burner, either gas or electric, with a heavy wire mesh. Place peppers on burner, at least on medium-high (check to see which 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 6–8 minutes until skins blister.

After blistering, place peppers in a pan and cover with a damp cloth. This makes peeling the peppers 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 might not be high enough. Commonly used acids in home canning are vinegar and lemon juice. Lemon juice is more acidic than vinegar, and it has less effect on the product's flavor. Use only vinegar that is at least 5 percent acid. Use only bottled lemon juice. An equal amount of lemon juice can 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 can 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 the 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 the following are true:

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



Refrigerate unsealed jars and consume within one week. If a jar is not sealed, you can 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*

5 cups tomatillos, chopped (green tomatoes can be substituted)

1½ cups long green chilies, seeded and chopped

½ 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 one-half inch of headspace. Adjust lids and process in a boiling water canner according to recommendations listed at the end of the recipes.

## Chile Salsa (Hot Tomato-Pepper Sauce)

*Yields 6–8 pints*

5 pounds tomatoes

1 cup vinegar (5 percent)

2 pounds chile peppers

3 teaspoons salt

1 pound onions

½ 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 chilies; slit each pepper along the side to allow steam to escape. Peel using one of these two methods to blister skins, and then peel. (See directions above.)

Peel, wash and dice onions. 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.

Hot pack: Combine prepared peppers, onions, tomatoes and remaining ingredients in a large saucepan. Heat to boiling, then simmer 10 minutes. Fill hot jars, leaving one-half inch of 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 listed at the end of the recipes.

## Peach Apple Salsa

*Yields 7 pints*

6 cups (2¼ pounds) chopped Roma tomatoes

2½ cups diced yellow onions (about 1 pound)

2 cups chopped green bell peppers (about 1½ large peppers)

10 cups (3½ pounds) chopped hard, unripe peaches (about 9 medium peaches)

2 cups chopped Granny Smith apples (2 large)

4 tablespoons mixed pickling spice

1 tablespoon canning salt

2 teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes

3¾ cups brown sugar, packed

2¼ cups cider vinegar (5 percent)

### Preparation

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

Place pickling spice on a clean, double-layered, 6-inch square piece of 100 percent cheesecloth. Bring corners together and tie with a clean string.

Wash and peel tomatoes (place washed tomatoes in boiling water for 1 minute, then immediately place in cold water and slip off skins). Chop into ½-inch pieces.

Peel, wash and dice onions into ¼-inch pieces.

Wash, core and seed bell peppers; chop into ¼-inch pieces.

Combine chopped vegetables into 8- or 10-quart Dutch oven or saucepot.

Wash, peel and pit peaches, and core apples; cut both into halves and soak for 10 minutes in an ascorbic acid solution (1,500 mg in one-half gallon of water). Drain fruit and chop into ½-inch cubes to prevent browning. Add to the saucepot with the vegetables.

Add the pickling spice bag to the saucepot; stir in salt, red pepper flakes, brown sugar and vinegar. Bring to boil and stir to mix ingredients. Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove spice bag and discard.

With slotted spoon, fill salsa into hot, clean pint jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace. Cover with cooking liquid, leaving one-half inch of headspace. Remove air bubbles and wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel; apply two-piece metal canning lids.

Process in a boiling water canner according to recommendations listed at the end of the recipes.

Serve as a side or spooned on top of grilled pork or other meats.

Recommended Processing Times for Tomatillo Green Salsa, Chile Salsa and Peach Apple Salsa in a Boiling Water Canner			
Style of Pack	Jar Size	Processing Times (in minutes)	
		0–1,000 ft	1,001–6,000 ft
Hot	Pint	15	20

### Important Note

The only changes you can safely make in the salsa recipes 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

- Address, E., and J. Harrison. *So Easy to Preserve*. 6th ed. Athens: University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, 2014.
- Hillers, Val, and Richard Dougherty. *Salsa Recipes for Canning*. Washington State University Cooperative Extension, 1992; revised 2000.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration; Associate Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; Director, Ohio State University Extension; and Gist Chair in Extension Education and Leadership.

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