

Canning Salsa

Freshly cut-up tomatoes, onions, and peppers make delicious sauces to serve over meat and seafood or to eat with tortilla chips.



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Most salsa recipes feature tomatoes, however fruit salsa is increasingly competing with tomato salsa. Both types of salsa are tasty and nutritious. Many people have developed their “special” salsa recipe using a unique blend of ingredients. A food safety issue is created when home food preservers use their “special” salsa for home canning. **Freezing is the only safe option for preserving untested or original salsa recipes.**

Because most salsa recipes contain low acid foods, special care must be taken to can salsa safely. Therefore, always use scientifically tested salsa recipes that contain adequate acidity to control the growth of *Clostridium botulinum* spores that can cause botulism. Recipes for canning both tomato and fruit salsa are found at the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#). While it is important to follow a research-tested recipe, some substitutions can safely be made as listed below.

Salsa Ingredients

Tomatoes:

- Paste tomatoes such as Roma have firmer flesh and produce thicker salsa than large slicing tomatoes.

- Do not remove seeds or juice from tomatoes unless the recipe specifies to do so.
- Thinner, watery salsa can be thickened by adding tomato paste.
- Although salsas are usually made with red tomatoes, any color tomato can be used.
- Do not use tomatoes from dead or frost killed vines because the pH of the tomato is changed and the product may spoil.
- Green tomatoes or tomatillos may be substituted for tomatoes in salsa recipes. Tomatillos, sometimes called Mexican husk tomatoes, do not need to be peeled or seeded, but the dry outer husk must be removed.

Peppers:

- Peppers range from mild to fiery hot in taste. Small (1 to 3 inches long), very hot peppers provide more heat than larger varieties. Seeds and membranes which contain the most heat in the peppers can be removed before adding to the salsa mixture.
- The skin of long green chilies may be tough and can be removed by heating the peppers. Finely chopped peppers are usually not skinned.
- Wear rubber gloves when you handle hot peppers because oils in the peppers cause extreme irritation to the skin; do not touch your eyes.
- Canned chilies may be used in place of fresh
- You can substitute one type of pepper for another, but **do not increase the total volume of peppers in any recipe.**

Acidic Ingredients:

- The acid ingredients in salsa help preserve it. You must add acid to canned salsa because the natural acidity may not be high enough. Commonly used acids are vinegar and bottled lemon juice.
- Lemon juice is more acidic than vinegar, but has less effect on flavor.
- You can safely substitute an equal amount of bottled lemon juice for vinegar in salsa recipes using vinegar. However, **do not substitute vinegar for lemon juice** because this would reduce acidity and produce an unsafe



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product.

- Regular bottled lime juice is a suitable substitute for lemon juice. Do not use key lime juice.
- Do not reduce the amount of lemon juice or vinegar. It is not safe to can salsa without adequate acidification.

Spices and herbs:

- Spices and herbs add flavoring to salsa but may be reduced or omitted if you prefer a milder taste. Cilantro and cumin are often used in spicy salsa.
- The amounts of dry spices may be changed.
- **Do not increase the amounts of fresh herbs or garlic** because they are low acid and can make the product unsafe. Fresh herbs may be added to the salsa after the jar is opened just before serving.

Onions:

- Red, yellow, or white onions can be substituted for each other in salsa. **Do not increase the total volume of onions.**

Other Ingredients:

- **Do not randomly add corn, black beans, or any other low acid vegetable** to a recipe for home canning salsa. There are no salsa recipes for canning that include corn or beans. A safer option is to add the corn or beans when ready to serve the home canned salsa.
- **Do not increase the proportions** of vegetables to acid and tomatoes because it might make the salsa unsafe.
- **Do not thicken** salsa with flour or cornstarch before canning. After you open a jar, you may pour off some of the liquid or thicken with cornstarch.

A new formula for canning salsa has been distributed by the National Center for Home Food Preservation. For people looking for some flexibility in canning salsa, a formula for making salsa, called “[Choice Salsa](#)” allows the food preserver to choose the amount of bell peppers, hot peppers, and onion in the recipe as long as the total amount does not exceed 9 cups and the amount of tomatoes remains at 6 cups. The amount of acidity must remain constant at 1½ cups of bottled lemon or bottled lime juice for this amount of tomatoes and vegetables.

Salsa canned using these guidelines is safe. Another option for preserving salsa is to freeze it. Any salsa recipe can be frozen. When frozen salsa is thawed, it may be watery. When you open a container, you may drain off the excess juice or you may thicken it with a starch such as cornstarch or flour just before serving it.

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Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Code: ART-5510