

Zesty Salsa

Makes about 8 pints (16 oz)

15 pounds tomatoes (40-50 individual; best types for salsa are roma, beefsteak, better boy, lemon boy)

3 cups chopped onions

3-6 jalapeño peppers, seeded, chopped

5-10 anaheim or poblano peppers, seeded, chopped

4-6 cloves garlic, minced

2 x 12- ounce cans tomato paste (adds body)

2 cups bottled lemon or lime juice (if you are using a mix, be sure to follow their recipe)

1 tablespoon salt (optional)

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 tablespoon ground cumin (optional)

1 tablespoons oregano, chopped

2 tablespoons parsley, chopped

2 tablespoons cilantro, chopped (optional)

2 teaspoon chili or cayenne powder (optional)

8 (16oz) pint glass preserving jars with lids and bands

1. PREPARE boiling water canner, jars, and other equipment.
2. BOIL a large pot of water for skinning tomatoes.
3. SCORE each tomato by making a small X across the base using a sharp knife.
4. DROP the tomato in to the pot of water, either individually or in small batches. Boil each tomato for 20-45 seconds, until the skin starts to pucker slightly. Do not overboil.
5. PLUNGE the boiled tomatoes into a bowl of ice water. Let cool.
6. REMOVE the skins of the tomatoes with your fingers, or by using a knife to make an 'equator' around the tomato.
7. CUT tomatoes in half (length-wise or cross-wise). Squeeze out excess water and seeds. You do not have to remove each seed; just try to get the majority out. Place the seeded tomatoes in a colander to drain while you work on the other tomatoes. If you want to save the juice (to drink or to use for cooking), place a large bowl under the colander.
8. CHOP tomatoes to desired size depending on desired salsa (chunky or smooth). Measure 12 cups of peeled, cored, chopped tomatoes. Place 12 cups of tomatoes into an 8-quart pot. Heat to boiling; reduce heat and simmer while you chop the rest of the ingredients.
9. CHOP onions, peppers, garlic, oregano, parsley, cilantro. You can also use a food processor.
10. MIX all ingredients EXCEPT cayenne pepper or chili powder in with tomatoes. Simmer for 10-15 minutes. You do not need to cook salsa; it only needs to reach 180oF to prepare for canning.

11. TASTE salsa as it cooks. Adjust seasoning. If it's not hot enough, add up to 1 teaspoon cayenne or chili powder.
12. LADLE hot salsa into hot jars leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe rim. Center lid on jar. Apply band until fit is fingertip tight.
13. PROCESS in a boiling water canner for 15 minutes, adjusting for altitude. Remove jars and cool. Turn jars top to bottom occasionally to distribute chunks as salsa is cooling.
14. After 12-24 hours, check that jars are sealed. Lid should not flex up and down when center is pressed. Label jars with date and contents. If jars are not sealed, place salsa in refrigerator and consume within 2-3 weeks. If sealed, salsa may be stored in a cool, dry place for up to 1 year.

Adapted from: <http://www.pickyourown.org/sala.htm>

Note: if you prefer, you can use a pre-packaged salsa spice kit. Ball and Mrs. Wages' both make good products. Be certain to follow the instructions on the product packaging; most packaged salsa kits use vinegar instead of lemon juice.

Need more info on peeling tomatoes? Check out the following websites:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Quickly-peel-a-tomato>

<http://www.globalgourmet.com/food/egg/egg0896/peelmat.html#axzz23GZhX900>

Basics of Boiling Water Canning

Step 1: prepare the Food. Follow the recipe! Use the type of pectin specified in recipe. When selecting new recipes to try, be certain the recipes are appropriate for long-term storage (i.e. not refrigerator jam) and boiling water canning (as opposed to a pressure canner). Doubling or tripling recipes can affect the set of jams and jellies.

Step 2: Prepare the Jars. While preparing the food to be canned, heat water in the canner. Position the rack in the bottom of the canner. Check jars for nicks, cracks, and rough edges. Sterilize jars at a minimum temperature of 180oF for a minimum of 5 minutes. Note that if you are doing a hot pack, you will need to sterilize the lids and rings in hot 180oF (not boiling) water. Exposing the lids to extremely hot temperatures will cause the compound in the lids to break down.

Step 3: Fill the Jars. Pack the jars as tightly as you can with the food without crushing it. Top with any hot liquid as specified in the recipe. Remove air bubbles by inserting a spatula down along the sides of the jar. Measure headspace, adding or removing food as needed. Wipe rims and threads of jar to remove residue that may interfere with seal.

Step 4: Put on Lid. Set lids on jar and screw on ring no more than fingertip-tight, just tight enough that you could turn the band another ½ to ¼ inch. This is important for a proper seal.

Step 5: Process the Jars. Work quickly to ensure that jars and food do not lose temperature. Lower jars in to canner. Jars need to be covered with 1 to 2 inches of water. Start processing time from the moment the water starts to boil after the jars are added. Keep at a low, roiling boil. Use process times specified in recipe. Processing too short a time means jars may not seal properly; too long a time will overcook food.

Step 6: Cool the Jars. Remove jars from canner and set on a wire rack or towel on the countertop (cold, bare countertops can crack jars). Do not tighten bands. Allow 12 to 24 hours to cool. After that time, test seal by firmly pressing on the center of the lid. It should not give. If properly sealed, store jars in a cool, dry place for up to one year. If it makes a popping sound, it is not properly sealed. You can, in theory, reprocess the jars again to try to get a proper seal, however it is safer to store the jars in the refrigerator and consume the food within 2-3 weeks. If you give away food in jars with an improper seal, be sure to communicate this clearly to the recipient!

Adapted from 'You Can Better'; Better Homes and Gardens, Wiley and Sons, 2010

Online Home Canning Resources

Food in jars: excellent home canning blog with lots of creative recipes. The author, Marisa McClellan, has also just published a cookbook called 'Food in Jars'

<http://www.foodinjars.com/>

Fresh Preserving: commercial website from the makers of Ball and Kerr jars. Some good recipes can be found here, as well as a complete product line of Ball products.

<http://www.freshpreserving.com>

National Center for Home Food Preservation: an online self-study course in food preservation from the University of Georgia.

<http://nchfp.uga.edu/>

Pick Your Own: search around the website for all kinds of information about fruit, pectin, and the process of canning (not to mention how to locate pick-your-own-farms).

<http://pickyourown.org/allaboutcanning.htm>

UAF Cooperative Extension: in the 'Food, Nutrition, and health' section, you'll find all kinds of free online publications and recipes.

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog/>

USDA complete Guide to Home Canning, 2009 revision: everything you ever wanted to know about home canning.

http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html