



Burning Issue: Canning Your Own Salsa Recipe

Can I can my own salsa recipe?



1. Salsas typically are mixtures of acid and low-acid ingredients; they are an example of an acidified food and appropriate for boiling water canning if the final pH of all components is less than 4.6. If the mixture has less acidity, it would need to be treated as a low-acid canned food and require sufficient research to eliminate a botulism risk as a canned food. If it is acid enough for boiling water canning, the actual proportions of ingredients and preparation method will help determine what the canning process time should be. So there is no way to tell someone how to can a homemade salsa without having detailed knowledge of the recipe, procedures used in preparation, and acidity and consistency of the final product. The proportions of your tomatoes, peppers, herbs and other vegetables will greatly influence what the safe canning process should be.

Summary, for all home canned foods: For home canning recipes, the specific recipe, and usually the preparation method, will determine how the product (salsa, in this case) can be processed-- whether in a boiling water canner (BWC) or a pressure canner (PC). A Boiling Water Canner can be used for acid and properly acidified foods, while a Pressure Canner is used for low-acid foods. Then, the process time in the canner will be dependent on the specific recipe and product characteristics.

Here is a link to a *Backgrounder on Heat Processing of Home-Canned Foods*, that will explain some of the science behind the development of home-canning recipe, especially for low-acid foods or mixtures:

<http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/nchfp/factsheets/heatprocessingbackgrounder.html>

It explains why it is not always possible to home can foods like those that are commercially available/store-bought, or your own recipes.

2. Our USDA and Cooperative Extension recipes and processes for home canning are all tried and tested, and processing times decided upon for the recipe as provided and tested. We only recommend recipes and procedures we know to be safe, and encourage consumers to use tested, science-based home-canning recipes from reliable sources like our website or some equipment or home preserving ingredient manufacturers. Our recommended home canning recipes for salsa, as well as a discussion of how ingredients impact safety, are collected in this publication:

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/uga/sensational_salsa.pdf

The same, but individual recipes with links to background information in some of them:

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/can_salsa.html

3. Someone new to canning or who has not read general canning principles should start with those principles: <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/general.html>

and know how canners are meant to be used, whether for boiling water or pressure canned products:

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/uga/using_bw_canners.html

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/uga/using_press_canners.html

4. At this time, we can only recommend tested recipes as safe for boiling water canning, and we ourselves do not offer a pressure-canning process for a low-acid salsa. There is a Mexican tomato sauce that is less acid and pressure canned only, but it is not a chunky salsa; it is more sauce-like. http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/can_salsa/mexican_tomato_sauce.html.

The rest of our recipes noted as salsas have enough acid in them to make them safe from botulism

when canned at boiling water temperatures only.

5. Your recipe could be frozen for long-term storage, but you will need to determine if you like the texture and flavor after freezing and thawing; there most likely will be changes in both texture and seasoning. I would try a small batch the first time for freezing. Many times herbs and spices are better tasting when added fresh after freezing and thawing, at serving time.

6. Please do not experiment with canning your own recipe that mixes low-acid vegetables together, even with "some" acid like vinegar or lime juice. If done improperly, you put yourself at risk for botulism, a potentially fatal food poisoning. This page has more on botulism and canned foods, as well as a section on the importance of food acidity and canning methods:
http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/general/ensuring_safe_canned_foods.html

7. If you want to explore private testing of your recipe for canning, it most likely will require an investment through private companies. You could contact your local Cooperative Extension office to see IF they have names of testing companies in your state, and/or if they could contact the Food Science Department at their state land-grant university to obtain help. You can find your local Extension office contact information by going to this page, http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/links/links_home.html, and choosing your state name out of the drop-down box under item number 2, Find Your Local Extension Office. That office may also have someone on staff to help you with canning advice, although they do not do product testing and development there. Not every county has such a local person, but many county offices do have publications and/or faculty able to help you with your canning questions.

8. In addition to reading the principles of canning, a new canner might want to also go through the National Center for Home Food Preservation free, online self-study course accessed from the homepage: www.homefoodpreservation.com, under the banner, *Preserving Food at Home: A Self-Study*. The University of Georgia sells a set of how-to videos, demonstrating a variety of canning, freezing, drying techniques. They also sell a book of all types of home food preservation recommendations (not just canning). Both are described at www.soeasytopreserve.com. The order forms are printable with ordering directions and prices; there is no online ordering available and prepayment must accompany the orders.

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National Center for Home Food Preservation

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