

SALSA FACTS AND TIPS



Salsa (SAL-saw) is a Spanish word for sauce. Today, salsa has replaced catsup as the most popular condiment in the world!

There are many tomato-based salsa recipes available (see *Salsa Recipes for Canning*). Other salsas gaining popularity include fruit salsas (based on papaya, mango and peaches) and vegetable salsas based on corn and black beans (see *Home-Canned Salsa*).

SALSA STYLES

- **Genuine Mexican Red Salsa:** Red, tomato-based with taste of cilantro. Cumin is often used, but not dominant. Onions are apparent, but not over-bearing. Hotness varies from mild to very hot. Usually served warm to provide full flavor.
- **Genuine Mexican Green Salsa:** Green color comes from using green peppers. Usually, a lot of Jalapeno pepper is used. Cilantro and onion balance the flavor. Hotness is on the extreme upper end!
- **Tex-Mex Salsa:** Bold tomato flavor with a little cumin. The kind of peppers used isn't important because a strong tomato flavor will drown out the pepper flavor.
- **Border Green Salsa:** Tomatillos are the primary source of color and flavor for this mild salsa. This salsa is light green in color and creamy in texture.

VEGETABLE SALSAS

Popular vegetables for salsa include corn, dried beans and peas, artichokes and even sweet potatoes and eggplants. Many of these salsas can be warmed and served as a

side dish in place of a vegetable or as a spread on sandwiches. Some of the lighter vegetable salsas can be served as a salad or used as a salad dressing.

FRUIT SALSAS

The combination of hot and sweet is a favorite with many people. You can use just about any fruit; tropical blends (e.g. bananas, pineapples, mangos and papayas) are popular.



Freshly prepared fruit salsas are the most perishable. Use only the freshest of fruits or substitute dried fruits. Avoid using frozen fruits because the texture will be affected. Fruit salsas can be served either hot or cold; they go well with fish or poultry and are great with desserts. Use them as a topping for ice cream or as a filling for a tart or pastry.

STORAGE

Rule of Thumb: Keep salsas in the refrigerator.

Commercially or properly home-canned salsa products can be stored without refrigeration until opened--then refrigerate.

Store home-canned salsa in a cool, dark place. For best eating quality and nutritive value, use within one year.

HOME-CANNED SALSAS

Most tomato-based salsas are a mixture of tomatoes, onions, peppers and spices. If made with enough acidic ingredients (e.g.

tomatoes, lemon juice, vinegar), the salsa can be processed safely in a boiling water canner. If there isn't enough acid, use a pressure canner.

For canning in a boiling water bath, the safe proportion of tomatoes to other vegetables is four parts tomato and acid, to one part all other vegetables combined. Any salsa with a higher proportion of vegetables to tomatoes should be processed in the pressure canner.

Always use a tested recipe to ensure it contains enough acid. Do not can salsas that do not follow research-tested recipes.

Lemon juice often is the acid of choice because it is more acidic and has less affect on the flavor than vinegar. Do NOT substitute vinegar for lemon juice because this will result in a less acidic and unsafe salsa.

If you like being creative with your salsa mixtures but don't own a pressure canner, plan to store your salsa in the refrigerator or freeze the product rather than canning it. NOTE: Freezing will soften the texture of the added chopped vegetables.

TOMATOES

The tomato type affects salsa quality. Paste tomatoes, such as Roma, have firmer flesh and produce a thicker salsa. Large slicing tomatoes will produce a thinner, more watery salsa. Poor quality or overripe tomatoes will produce very poor or unsafe salsa.



Dried and canned tomatoes can be used. Roasting tomatoes and vegetables and including some of the roasted skins has become popular and adds another flavor dimension.

Salsa can be thickened by adding tomato paste. Salsas that are thin can be thickened after opening with cornstarch or flour--NEVER thicken salsa before canning because you may end up with an unsafe product.

Green tomatoes or tomatillos (also known as Mexican husk tomatoes) can be substituted for red tomatoes or mixed with them. Tomatillos do not need to be peeled or seeded, but the dry outer husk must be removed.

PEPPERS

Peppers range from mild to fiery in taste and can affect the “heat” of salsa.



Very hot peppers are usually small (one to three inches long). Favorite hot peppers include jalapeno, Serrano, Cayenne, Habanero, chili and hot cherry.

Be sure to use rubber gloves when cutting or dicing hot peppers because they can cause extreme irritation to the skin. **Be careful not to touch your face**, particularly the area around your eyes, when you are working with hot peppers.

Mild peppers usually are larger (four to ten inches long) than hot peppers. Examples of popular varieties include bell, sweet cherry, pimiento and sweet banana peppers. Choose a mild pepper when the recipe calls for long green chilies. For variety, substitute bell peppers for some or all of the long green chilies called for in a recipe. The skin of long green chilies may be tough and can be removed by heating the peppers. When peppers are finely chopped, they usually do not need to be skinned.

SPICES

Cilantro and cumin are often used in spicy salsas. If you prefer a salsa with a milder taste, you can leave them out. For a stronger cilantro flavor, add fresh cilantro just before serving salsa.

RESOURCES

Ball Blue Book.
Colorado State University Cooperative Extension.
North Dakota State University Extension Service.
University of Minnesota Extension Service.
Washington State University—Cooperative Extension.