



Preserving Tomatoes Tart and Tasty!

When those big, plump tomatoes in your garden begin to turn from blushing pink to red, it's time to think about preserving their goodness for year-round use. Tomatoes are without a doubt the most widely home-canned product in the U.S. However, to avoid spoilage and the risk of food poisoning, home canning must be done properly. Tomatoes require a certain level of acid for safe home canning (pH of 4.6 or less). The acid level of tomatoes varies due to several factors including the type of tomato, conditions during the growing season, and the soil in which the plants are grown. This variation often places tomatoes close to the cut-off for safe canning and because of this, acid must be added to all tomatoes when home canning—regardless of whether the tomatoes are yellow, red or pink; regular or paste-type.

Research in 1994 established safe methods for canning tomatoes with added acid. Citric acid is very effective for increasing the acidity of tomatoes and tomato products without causing noticeable changes in flavor. Commercial processors of canned tomatoes use citric acid for their products. Citric acid is available where canning supplies are sold or can be ordered online. Use 1/2-teaspoon citric acid per quart or 1/4-teaspoon per pint.

Canned tomatoes can also be acidified with bottled lemon juice. Add 1 tablespoon per pint or 2 tablespoons per quart. Measure this amount into canning jars before sealing. A small amount of sugar—one teaspoon per quart—can be added to offset the acid taste. However, the level of acid in freshly squeezed lemon juice is not standardized and cannot substitute for bottled lemon juice. Be sure to add acid to all canned tomato products, whether pressure canned or water-bath canned. Vinegar cannot be substituted for lemon juice or citric acid and should only be used, where directed, in a tested recipe.

SIDE BAR:

Potential sources of citric acid: (Inclusion is not an endorsement of supplier.) Each 5-ounce container should be sufficient for 50 quarts of tomatoes.

-- Kitchen Krafts <http://www.kitchenkrafts.com/> 1-800-776-0575,
IN0002 5 oz., \$2.80

-- Canning Pantry.com <http://www.canningpantry.com/citric-acid.html>
5 oz., \$2.97

-- Mrs. Wages <http://store.yahoo.com/mrswages/> 1-800-647-8170,
W507 5 oz., \$3.05

Overripe, damaged or decayed tomatoes, tomatoes exposed to frost or harvested from dead or frost-killed vines, or late-season tomatoes ripening indoors may not be safe for canning. Do not use them for canned tomatoes or juice. Tomatoes not suitable for canning may be trimmed and eaten fresh, or heated and used in a frozen product.

Low-acid ingredients such as carrots, celery, corn, green or hot peppers, mushrooms, or onions will significantly decrease the acidity of canned tomatoes. Never add more of these ingredients than called for in the recipe. Also, never add a thickening agent such as flour, cornstarch, rice or pasta to tomato products before canning. You may thicken these products before serving. Thickened condensed tomato soup can be successfully frozen, but never home-canned.

Freezing tomatoes. You can also successfully preserve tomatoes by freezing. To freeze whole or quartered tomatoes, prepare them as you would hot-pack, canned tomatoes. Chill the heated tomatoes and pack into freezer containers, leaving a 1-inch headspace. Seal, label and date, and freeze at 0°F or lower. Use them just as you would canned tomatoes. Tomato sauces can also be frozen with excellent results. Tomato products thickened with flour, cornstarch or modified starch must be frozen; they cannot be safely canned at home. Use frozen tomato products within a year, as quality will suffer if they are frozen for longer.

You may want to make a tomato based-vegetable soup. If you can tomatoes in a soup mix with other vegetables such as carrots, celery, corn, lima beans, mushrooms, onions, peas, peppers or potatoes, process them in a pressure canner. Adding a significant amount of vegetables to tomatoes decreases the acidity of the mixture, and the product must be pressure canned. For vegetable processing times, see Canning Vegetables Safely (B1159), available from your county UW-Extension office.

More information and recipes can be found in Tomatoes Tart and Tasty (B2605), Freezing Fruits and Vegetables (B3278), and Canning Salsa Safely (B3570) (tomato-based salsas). These food preservation publications from UW-Extension are part of The Wisconsin Safe Food Preservation Series by Barbara Ingham. The series also includes: Canning Fruits Safely (B0430), Making Jams, Jellies and Preserves (B2909), Canning Vegetables Safely (B1159), Homemade Pickles and Relishes (B2267) and Canning Meat, Wild Game, Poultry and Fish Safely (B3345). The publications are available from Outagamie County UW-Extension office or from Cooperative Extension Publications (877-947-7827) and online at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu>. There is a fee for the publications; some are printable online free of charge.

Karen Dickrell, Family Living Educator
UW-Extension, Outagamie County
3365 W Brewster St., Appleton, WI 54914

Telephone: (920) 832-5121
e-mail: karen.dickrell@ces.uwex.edu
Web Site: www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/outagamie/
Publications: http://learningstore.uwex.edu

Recipes for Frozen Tomatoes

Frozen crushed tomatoes

Wash. Blanch one minute to loosen skins, peel and core. Simmer 10 to 20 minutes until tender. Cool and pack in rigid containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Label and date and freeze at 0 degrees F, or lower, for up to 12 months.

Canned tomatoes — Crushed, quartered, hot pack (no added liquid)

1. Wash high-quality, firm, ripe tomatoes.
2. Dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skin splits. Then dip in cold water, slip off skins, remove cores, and cut into quarters.
3. Crush some of the quartered tomatoes in a large kettle while heating rapidly. Gradually add remaining quartered tomatoes, stirring constantly. After all tomatoes are added, boil gently for 5 minutes.
4. Fill jars with hot tomatoes, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Add 1/2-teaspoon citric acid or 2 tablespoons bottled lemon juice to each quart jar; add 1/4-teaspoon citric acid or 1-tablespoon bottled lemon juice to each pint. Add 1-teaspoon salt and 1-teaspoon sugar per quart, if desired.
5. Clean jar rims and cap with properly pretreated lids. Process using one of the three methods below. Process time at Wisconsin altitudes (up to 2,000 ft.):
 - Boiling water canner: 40 minutes for pints, 50 minutes for quarts
 - Dial-gauge canner for pints or quarts: 20 minutes at 6 psi, 15 minutes at 11 psi
 - Weighted gauge canner for pints or quarts: 20 minutes at 10 psi, 15 minutes at 15 psi

Stewed Tomatoes

4 quarts tomatoes, peeled and chopped (~24 large)

1 cup celery, chopped (~3 stalks)

1/2 cup onion, chopped (~1 medium)

1/4 cup green pepper, chopped

1 tbsp sugar

2 tsp salt

Yield: 7 pints or 3 quarts

Combine all ingredients in a large stockpot. Cover, and cook 10 minutes, stirring to prevent sticking. Ladle vegetables into hot jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Remove excess air from the jar by running a spatula or knife between the tomatoes and the side of the jar in several places. Clean jar rims and cap with pretreated lids.

Process 15 minutes for pints and 20 minutes for quarts in a pressure canner. Pressure: 11 psi (dial gauge) or 15 psi (weighted gauge).

Do **NOT** increase the amount of vegetables; an unsafe product may result.

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