



Canning Tomatoes

This is the vegetable we long for most when supermarkets offer rather flavorless winter tomatoes.

If processing tomatoes with citric acid or lemon juice added is not part of your tomato canning procedures you need to update your canning information. Tomato processing procedures have changed over the years and the latest USDA recommendations include processing some packs of tomatoes 85 minutes in a boiling water bath canner.

Also, if you are processing vegetables in a pressure canner, remember to process your food at a pressure and time appropriate to where you are canning. Many places in New York State are over 1000 feet and food must be canned according to recommended longer lengths of time. Contact your local Cornell Cooperative Extension for the necessary information.

Other adjustments and reminders include:

-Vent all pressure canners 10 minutes before the weight is put on the vent pipe or the petcock is closed. This will be in conflict with directions now found in some older canner directions.

-Steam canners which are not pressurized are NOT a safe way to process food.

-All fruit spreads - jams, jellies, preserves, and fruit butters need to be placed into sterile empty jars, sealed with a two piece lid, and processed 5 minutes in a boiling water

bath. Any use of paraffin is NO longer recommended.

-Follow manufacturer's recommendations for lid treatment in order to ensure they will seal. All lid brands do not have the same directions. Always read the directions.

-Hot packing food is the best way to remove air from jars. It removes air from the food itself as well as reducing the air trapped between food pieces and in the head space. The food shrinks and more food will fit into the jars.

-To reduce sealing failures, turn off the burner at the conclusion of the processing time, and leave the jars in the water for 5 minutes. Then carefully remove the jars, holding them upright and placing them 1 inch apart on a clean towel or cooling rack.

-If jars do not seal within 24 hours they must have new lids and be re-processed for the full amount of time. The quality of the food will be lower but it will be safe. Alternatives to reprocessing are to refrigerate the food and use in 1 or 2 days or to freeze it.

HOME CANNER'S QUESTIONS

Q. I understand why tomatoes need to be acidified with bottled lemon juice but I'm not sure how much to use?

A. To ensure safe acidity in whole crushed or juiced tomatoes, add two tablespoons of bottled lemon juice or ½ teaspoon of citric acid per quart of tomatoes. For pints, use one tablespoon bottled lemon juice or 1/4 teaspoon citric acid.

Q. I like to add celery, green pepper, and onions to tomatoes when I can them. Is this safe?

A. Adding other vegetables lowers the acidity of tomatoes, which can provide a

favorable environment for the growth of botulism bacteria. Mixtures require the pressure canner method of processing and use of reliable directions.

Q. Sometimes, after opening one of my jars of home-canned ketchup, I notice a white substance on the inside of the lid. It's not soft and fuzzy like mold, but seems rather hard and granular. The lid is still sealed before the jar is opened. Can I use my ketchup?

A. The white substance you describe is calcium acetate, which is formed when the acid in the food and the calcium carbonate in the sealing composition of the lid come in contact with one another. It sometimes forms on the lids of high acid foods, such as ketchup, chili sauce or other tomato products.

The formation of calcium acetate crystals is harmless, but we're sure many home-canned foods have been tossed out when it is mistaken for mold. Actually it's easy to tell the difference between the two: mold is soft and slimy, while crystals of calcium acetate are hard and granular to the touch.

As long as you've acidified your tomato products and have processed them according to a current recommended recipe, your home-canned tomato products should be safe to use.

Look for recipes from reliable, tested resources such as *So Easy to Preserve*, 5th Edition, Cooperative Extension, University of Georgia; *The Ball Blue Book - Guide to Preserving*; and the National Center for Home Food Preservation website

www.homefoodpreservation.org

Resource: *Cindy Shuster, Associate Professor, Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences, Perry County, Ohio State University; revised by Judy Price and Katherine Humphrey, NYS Food Preservation Experts, Cornell Cooperative Extension, 5/2009.*