

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT TOMATOES

Utah County grows great tomatoes, and the good news is that the current guidelines enable us to can all the varieties safely.

The current tomato canning guidelines were announced by USDA in 1988 after four years of research. These guidelines are used in the canning books by Ball and Kerr. Even a canning book from Canada uses these same tomato canning guidelines.

TOMATO CANNING GUIDELINES CHANGED BECAUSE THE TOMATOES THEMSELVES HAVE CHANGED.

An increasing number of tomatoes are lower in acid. Adding acid according to current guidelines allows use of the boiling water canner without risks.

The longer processing times allow adequate heat penetration even when canning dense, meaty tomatoes such as the popular paste tomatoes.

Here are answers to some common questions:



QUESTION: Is it true that tomatoes must be pressure canned to be safe?

ANSWER: No, pressure canning is *not* required. Tomatoes may be safely canned in a boiling water canner following current guidelines. Of course, pressure canning is an option if the consumer so chooses.



QUESTION: I've heard that canning tomatoes in the boiling water canner requires 95 minutes! Is this my only option?

ANSWER: Processing times in the boiling water canner vary from 95 minutes to a "mere" 55 minutes depending on how the tomatoes are put in the jars.



QUESTION: If I follow the current processing times, do I still need to add acid?

ANSWER: Yes, you still need the acid. The processing time is needed for dense, meaty tomatoes; the acid adds an important safety factor when canning lower acid tomatoes.

QUESTION: If current canning guidelines are followed, what will be the quality of the tomatoes?



ANSWER: There is good retention of the vitamin A value, because beta carotene is quite heat stable.

Most tomatoes will look fine. Some, especially juicy, less meaty varieties, may separate into pieces. These would work well in soups, stews, casseroles, and sauces where bite-size pieces of tomato are wanted.



QUESTION: If canning procedures for tomatoes have changed, what about salsa and other tomato mixtures?

ANSWER: Canning guidelines for almost all tomato mixtures changed in 1988. If your salsa recipe dates from before that time, please compare with a current, tested recipe.



QUESTION: What causes bottled tomatoes to separate into a clear liquid at the bottom of the jar and the tomatoes all above?

ANSWER: This harmless separation is caused by an enzyme breaking down the pectin when tomatoes are cut and allowed to stand *for even a few minutes*. This naturally occurring pectin acts as a stabilizer in the tomato; if much of the pectin breaks down, there may be separation.

If you want to avoid this separation, you must quickly inactivate the enzyme by heating the tomatoes through. Work with small quantities of tomatoes and heat quickly to boiling.



QUESTION: How many tomatoes do I buy?

ANSWER: For hot packed tomatoes it takes an average of 22 pounds of tomatoes for 7 quarts; an average of 14 pounds fresh per canner load of 9 pints. A bushel weighs 53 pounds and yields 17 to 20 quarts of bottled tomatoes – an average of 2 3/4 pounds per quart.



QUESTION: Do tomatoes freeze well?

ANSWER: While tomatoes may be frozen raw, the quality over time will be better if tomatoes are heated through first. Enzymes are deactivated and oxygen has a chance to escape from the tissue as the tomato shrinks during heating.

Wash, core and cut tomatoes. Cook until tender (10 to 20 minutes). Chill tomatoes. Package in freezer-weight containers, leaving headspace.

UTAH COUNTY OFFICE

100 East Center Street,
Room L600, Provo, UT 84606
Phone: 801-851-8460
email: utah@ext.usu.edu

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