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Can Your “Choice Salsa” Safely

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So often people have asked if it is possible to use their own salsa recipe and can it safely. In the past the best response was: no, use it fresh or freeze it. Now there is a tested, generic recipe that allows for creativity without giving up safety.

The National Center for Home Food Preservation of University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension has released their guidance on preparing and canning what they call Choice Salsa.

Choice Salsa provides the required proportions of each ingredient to insure that the final product can safely be canned in a boiling water canner. The recipe to make about 6 pint jars is simple:

- 6 cups peeled, cored, seeded and chopped ripe tomatoes
- 9 cups diced onions and/or peppers of any variety
- 1½ cups commercially bottled lemon or lime juice
- 3 teaspoons canning or pickling salt

The directions then specify the particulars. For example, tomatoes can be any variety or color but should be peeled and cored, the seeds removed, and chopped into ¼ to ½ inch pieces. Likewise, the onions and peppers should be diced into ¼ inch pieces. The onions and sweet peppers used should be cored and the peppers’ seeds and membranes removed. For the hot peppers, if used, the amount of seeds removed depends on how hot a salsa is desired – more seeds means more heat.

There are also some notes specific to keeping this recipe safe. For example, it says, “Do not alter the proportions of tomatoes, vegetables and acid... The chopped tomatoes and diced peppers and/or onions are to be measured level in dry measuring cups; the lemon or lime juice is measured in a liquid measuring cup.”

The commercially bottled lemon or lime juice provides the acid that is needed to make the recipe safe. It is, “to standardize a minimum level of acidity in the recipe.” Lemon and lime juice were tested over vinegar to maximize flavor. Because of a difference in acidity, do not use vinegar in place of the juice. Also key lime juice is not sufficient to maintain safe acidity levels.

For the full recipe for canning your Choice Salsa, search at homefoodpreservation.com. For more information on this, or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition Specialist, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.