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Preserving Tomatoes – Answers to Common Questions

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There have been some common themes this tomato harvest season. Here are a few of the questions that have come up and their answers.

Q: I don't harvest enough tomatoes at once to make a canner load of salsa. Can I freeze the tomatoes first in the smaller quantities I have and then when I have enough thaw them and make salsa?

A: It is okay to freeze tomatoes. When tomatoes freeze, though, they get mushier. Then when they are cooked to make the salsa, they will get softer still. The final product will not be the same as a fresh salsa with crisp/firm vegetables. But if the softer consistency is acceptable, then this method will work.

To freeze the tomatoes, select high quality, ripe tomatoes. Wash and remove the skins by gently cutting a thin 'X' just through the skin at the blossom end. Dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds, then in ice water for 30 to 60 seconds to loosen the skins. Slip the skins off, place in freezer bags or other appropriate containers leaving one inch headspace. Seal, label and freeze.

University of Missouri Extension has a publication on *Freezing Vegetables* (GH 1503) that explains the steps for freezing tomatoes. The MU Extension guide *Tantalizing Tomatoes* (GH 1456) has some salsa recipes and the procedures for canning them. They can also be found at <http://extension.missouri.edu> and use the search box at the top right to find the particular guide.

Q: What if I have my own favorite salsa recipe? Can I can that?

A: For a safe, shelf-stable final product follow USDA-tested recipes and procedures. To find a tested salsa recipe that would be safe for canning, go http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa.html. Try these and see which looks good. There are several to choose from, including some that include fruit, such as mango salsa or peach apple salsa. If using a *homemade* recipe, the salsa can be used fresh or frozen.

Q: Can I can yellow tomatoes? If so, how?

A: Yes, yellow tomatoes, as well as ripe green, orange and purple tomatoes, are canned, frozen or dehydrated in just the same way as red ones. Remember that to can crushed, whole or juiced tomatoes or tomato sauce, add acid to can safely. Add 2 Tablespoons of bottled lemon juice or ½ teaspoon of citric acid per quart.

For more information on handling the tomato harvest safely, 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.