



Garden to Table Series - Salsa

What is Salsa?

Salsa is a flavorful, spicy Mexican sauce made from fresh tomatoes, onions, chili peppers, cilantro, and lime juice. It adds color, texture, and zest to a variety of dishes and is a popular accompaniment in Mexican and Californian cuisine. We'll focus on planting, growing, and harvesting tomatoes, peppers, and cilantro.

Tomatoes

- Select appropriate variety for salsa - 2 types: Determinate short bushy plant, grows for short period of time and work better in a container, while Indeterminate are tall vine plants and continuously produce fruit. Also, you may want to select a variety that has thicker walls and is less juicy for chunkier salsa.
- Tomatoes thrive in well-draining, nutrient-rich soil. Amend your garden beds with compost or aged manure to provide the necessary nutrients. If planting in a container, do not use soil from the ground, use potting soil. You can use general purpose fertilizers when planting and approximately every other month.
- Plant tomatoes in full sun, at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day - usually around April, to transplant tomato seedlings outside. Remember, seedlings can take up to 8 weeks before they can be transplanted.
- Space tomato plants 2-3 feet apart to allow for proper air circulation, and stake or cage when small.
- Water tomato plants deeply, 1-2 inches per week, to encourage deep root growth. Avoid getting the leaves wet, as this can lead to fungal diseases, and mulch around the base of plants to help retain soil moisture.
- Harvest when fully ripe and red, use within 5 days, and remember, do not refrigerate tomatoes.

Jalapeño

- Jalapeños thrive in the warm, sunny climate of Ventura County. They prefer well-draining, nutrient-rich soil. Amend soil with compost or aged manure to provide the nutrients jalapeños need.
- Plant jalapeño seedlings in April/May, and remember, start seedlings 8 weeks before planting outside.
- Space plants 12-18 inches apart, in a sunny (at least 6-8 hours per day) spot. Fertilize like tomatoes.
- Water regularly, about 1-2 inches per week, avoid getting the foliage wet-apply mulch to retain moisture.
- Harvest jalapeños when they are bright green and firm, usually 2-3 months after planting.

Cilantro

- Cilantro grows well in this area - it prefers well-draining, nutrient-rich soil – mix in compost.
- Sow seeds directly in the garden or container (6-12 inches apart) every 2-3 weeks for continuous crops.
- Plant in full sun to **partial shade**. Cilantro can bolt (go to seed) in direct, intense sun.
- Keep soil consistently moist but not waterlogged, snip off leaves as needed, cutting the plants back by 1/3 to encourage new growth.
- Harvest leaves and stems as needed or harvest the whole plant before it bolts for the best flavor.

Using Your Homegrown Ingredients

- Wash and chop all vegetables just before using.
- Combine tomatoes, onions, jalapeño, cilantro, and lime juice.
- Season with salt and pepper to taste.
- Let it sit for 30 minutes to allow flavors to meld.
- Enjoy your fresh, homemade salsa!

Note - you can also make salsa with beets or carrots - just substitute these for the tomatoes - or to jazz your salsa a bit - roast the tomatoes and jalapeño first.

Resources

- UC ANR - Master Gardeners of Ventura County - <https://ucanr.edu/sites/VCMG/>
- UC ANR Home Gardening- Home Page - https://ucanr.edu/sites/vric3/Home_gardening/
- UCANR Vegetable Gardening- <https://rng.ucanr.edu/Gardening/Vegetable/UCDavis>