

Tomatoes, Tomatoes, Tomatoes

By Sue Mosbacher, UCCE Master Food Preserver Coordinator

If you are also finding the silver lining of staying/working at home this summer is having the time to plant and tend to your garden, you may be wishing for a bumper crop of tomatoes. What happens if you get what you asked for and your tomato plants are prolific producers?

Preserve those tomatoes!



Freeze tomatoes on a tray. When completely frozen, transfer to a bag getting as much air out as possible. Photo by Susan Mosbacher, UCCE Master Food Preserver Coordinator, Central Sierra.

The easiest way to preserve tomatoes is to freeze them. You don't need to blanch them, you don't need to peel them. Just rinse, dry, core, and put them on a small tray or plate in the freezer. Once frozen solid, move them to a freezer bag, removing as much air from the bag as possible before closing. Pull them out of the freezer when you're ready to use them. To peel, let them thaw just a little and then run under warm water to slip off the skins. It's that easy.

Don't throw away those skins! Or soft tomatoes. If you have a dehydrator, lay the tomato skins on the tray and sprinkle with your favorite spice mix (garlic salt works well). Dry until crispy and you have a tomato skin chip! Some heirloom tomato skins are bursting with flavor. Or instead of chips,

toss tomato skins and soft tomatoes into a freezer bag; keep adding to it until you fill the bag. Thaw and puree the bag's content and dry it on your dehydrator tray until it is a crisp leather. Grind the leather to make a tomato powder to use for camping soup mixes, dehydrated salsa mix, to make one tablespoon of tomato powder, to sprinkle on scrambled eggs for tomato flavor without the extra moisture, to enhance the flavor of meatloaf or burgers, to flavor soups – get creative!

If you're a canner, there are lots of options. Many people don't think of tomatoes as a basis for jam or jelly, but with the right spices and some sugar, the flavor profile changes significantly. We served [Spiced Tomato Jam](#) in a blind taste test with third graders a few years ago and they guessed they were eating apple pie and pumpkin pie because of the nutmeg, cinnamon and allspice. It's delicious!

A family favorite is [Tomato Apple Chutney](#). It's a collection of tomatoes, apples, onions, raisins, garlic, cucumber, red bell peppers, a little sugar and spices. I like to mix it with mayonnaise for a sandwich spread. The first time I made it my husband and I ate sandwiches for lunch and dinner three days in a row. It will be one of the first red tomato products I can this summer.

Another family favorite is [Roasted Eggplant and Pepper Puttanesca Sauce](#). The combination of roasted plum tomatoes, eggplant, onions and red peppers with capers, olives, spices, balsamic vinegar and wine make a chunky pasta sauce that smells fabulous when you open the jar. I usually make 3-4 double batches and enjoy them all year.



Tomatillo Salsa. Photo by Susan Mosbacher, UCCE Master Food Preserver Coordinator, Central Sierra.

My pantry staple is plain [crushed tomatoes](#). I add spices when I make a meal, cooking them down, adding tomato paste (remember the tomato powder?) and dried veggies. Each jar of crushed tomatoes can become part of a unique meal. The main thing to remember is to [add acid to each jar before filling it](#) to ensure there's enough acidity to make the tomatoes a high acid food and safe to can in a steam canner or boiling water canner. I normally use bottled lemon juice, but this year I'm going to try a few jars with cider vinegar; rumor has it that after being stored for several months the vinegar flavor mellows and enhances the flavor. I'll make sure I label the jars to identify the acid used.



*Dehydrated cherry tomatoes. Yummy snack!
Photo by Summer Brasuel, UCCE Master Food
Preserver Volunteer, Central Sierra.*

I learned a great tip at one of our public classes a couple of years ago. Often when canning tomatoes, there's watery liquid at the bottom of the cook pot that doesn't make it into the jar since you want as many tomatoes as possible in the jars. Don't throw out the tomato water! You can jar that and can it with the rest of your jars of crushed tomatoes. Use the tomato water to cook couscous, quinoa, rice or as the liquid in a soup.

This is the first year I've actually put my garden in on time and shouldn't have plants loaded with green tomatoes right before the first freeze. If I do, I'll be thrilled because I'll make [Green Tomato Salsa Verde](#) – it's delicious! (It ranks up there with [tomatillo salsa](#); I just finished my second double batch this

weekend.) Green tomatoes are more acidic than ripened tomatoes and you can use them in place of red tomatoes in any canning recipe, following standard [acidification methods](#).

I just picked a cherry tomato off the potted plant on my back patio for easy snacking access. I'm so excited for more! If I get too many to eat within a couple of days I'll cut them in half and dehydrate them. The result is as good as candy.

So many tomato possibilities! If you want more ideas, contact the UC Master Food Preserver help line either by phone (530-621-5506), email (edmf@ucanr.edu) or through our online [Ask a Master Food Preserver](#).

Enjoy your tomatoes!