



**August 2009**

# HOME FOOD PRESERVATION NEWSLETTER

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## Upcoming Workshops:

Check the University of Minnesota Extension website for a list of [upcoming workshops](#)

## For more food preservation information:

Answer Line:  
1-800-854-1678

[U of MN Food Safety—Food Preservation](#)

[National Center for Home Food Preservation](#)

[Order So Easy to Preserve \(5th Edition\)](#)

## Welcome!

Ooops! The phone number for AnswerLine in the July 2009 "Home Food Preservation Newsletter" was wrong. The correct number for AnswerLine is **1-800-854-1678**. Thanks to everyone who contacted us. Now we know you read this newsletter!

AnswerLine is a great, reliable, research-based resource for your food preservation questions. You will speak with a live person to get your answers if you call between 9 AM to noon and 1 to 4 PM. You can also send your question via email to [answer@iastate.edu](mailto:answer@iastate.edu).

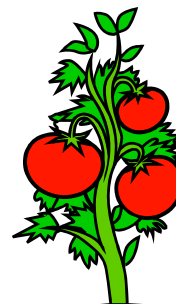


## Safe Tomato Tips

Today's tomatoes border the fine line between high and low acid foods. To make sure home-canned tomatoes are safe, it's very important to add acid to tomatoes and tomato products.

If acid is not added to each jar of tomatoes or tomato products, bacteria can grow and create an unsafe product. The acid may be added directly to each jar before adding the tomatoes or tomato mixture.

A little sugar may be added to offset the taste of the acid, if desired. The sugar will not change the acidity level.



Acid	Effect on Tomatoes or Tomato Mixtures	Amount
Citric Acid	Little change in flavor	½ teaspoon per quart ¼ teaspoon per pint
Bottled Lemon Juice	Easy to use. Can substitute bottled lime juice. Do not use fresh squeezed lemon juice because the acid level is uncertain and there is a chance of contamination.	2 tablespoons per quart 1 tablespoon per pint
Vinegar (5% acidity)	Noticeable change in flavor	4 tablespoons per quart 2 tablespoons per pint

## Safe Salsa Advice

Most salsa recipes combine onions, peppers and tomatoes with added acid (lemon juice, lime juice or vinegar). The type and amount of ingredients and preparation methods are important considerations in how salsa is canned. If salsa or other tomato-vegetable mixtures are not canned properly, they can support the growth of a potentially harmful bacterium, *Clostridium botulinum*.



To home-can salsa safely, it is extremely important that you follow a tested and approved recipe for home-canning. Food scientists tested recipes to make sure that the amount of acid combined with other ingredients is safe for home-canning, and that the processing times and methods will destroy harmful microorganisms.

The recipe ingredient amounts and processing methods must be followed to the letter. If you enjoy creating your own salsa recipe or tweaking a recipe, plan to freeze it or store it for several weeks in the refrigerator and eat it fresh.

Check recommended [salsa resources](#) for reliable salsa recipes.



## Home-Canned Salsa Guidelines

- Do not reduce the amount of lemon juice, vinegar or tomatoes.
- Do not add extra peppers, onion or garlic but you can REDUCE the amount of peppers, onion or garlic.
- You can substitute one type of pepper for another.
- Paste tomatoes contribute to a thicker salsa, while slicing tomatoes yield a thinner salsa. Do not drain or squeeze tomatoes to remove the liquid and juices or you will be removing some of the needed acids.
- Red, yellow or white onions may be substituted for each other.
- The amount of dry spices may be altered or deleted.
- For a stronger cilantro flavor, add fresh cilantro just before serving.
- Never add flour or cornstarch to salsa before canning because heat may not penetrate through the jar to destroy harmful microorganisms. Thicken salsas by adding tomato paste or using a paste tomato.



## Freeze Peppers

If you have a lot of peppers, store them unwashed in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator up to one week. Before using, rinse with cool water.



To freeze peppers, choose crisp, tender green, bright red or bright yellow pods. Wash, cut out stem, cut in half and remove seeds. Peppers may be cut into ½-inch strips or rings. If the peppers will be used in cooked dishes, water-blanch halves for 3 minutes; strips or rings for 2 minutes. Cool promptly, drain and package, leaving ½-inch head space. Seal, label and freeze. If the peppers will be used in uncooked foods, package them raw, leaving no head space. Seal, label and freeze.

## Sweet Corn



Sweet corn is an easy vegetable to freeze and produces a tasty, quality product when frozen properly.

Harvested corn on the cob is at its optimum quality for 48 hours. When harvesting, do so early in the morning before the heat of the day. Once husked, the ears are blanched in boiling water for 4 minutes, followed by a complete cooling in ice water for about 8 minutes. Drain and cut the kernels from the cob.

An electric knife is a handy tool for cutting off the kernels. Package the corn in freezer containers, leaving ½-inch headspace. Seal and freeze at 0° F or below for best quality.

Blanching, followed by chilling in ice water, are critical processes for producing quality frozen corn. The natural enzymes in corn need to be inactivated by blanching to prevent both loss of color and nutrients, and flavor and texture changes. Inadequately chilled corn may become mushy due to overcooking the starch.

Can you freeze corn on the cob? Yes, it can be done, but with mixed results. Corn lovers are often disappointed with the sometimes mushy, rubbery texture and the cobby taste. It also takes up more space in the freezer.

You can enjoy the great taste of summertime sweet corn all year long by following the simple, basic procedures for freezing vegetables.



## Pickling: It's Not Just for Cucumbers!

Vegetables from asparagus to zucchini can be home preserved by pickling. The key is to select a recipe from an approved source that is specifically designed for the vegetable you are pickling. Follow the directions carefully for a safe, high quality product.

Begin by selecting tender vegetables and plan to pickle within 24 hours of picking. Wash well and drain. Green beans, carrots, and zucchini are raw packed; whereas asparagus is blanched and beets need to be pre-cooked in their skins for 30 minutes.

Cider vinegar has a good flavor and aroma, but may darken white or light-colored vegetables. White distilled vinegar is the preferred choice for pickling. Follow the recipe recommendations for the ratio of vinegar to water; it does vary by the vegetable.

Pickling or canning salt should be used as other salts contain anti-caking materials that may make the brine cloudy. Use fresh whole spices for the best quality and flavor.

Pickled vegetable recipes are developed for pint or ½-pint canning jars. To insure a safe home canned product, water bath process for 5 minutes to 30 minutes as stated in the recipe.



## Sauerkraut

A grilled bratwurst topped with sauerkraut, a summertime treat! Sauerkraut can easily be made at home with its basic ingredients cabbage and salt.

To make good kraut, begin by selecting disease-free, firm, mature heads of cabbage and begin cleaning and shredding the cabbage within 24 to 48 hours of harvest. A kraut cutter is the traditional way to shred the cabbage, but a modern-day food processor works well.

Canning or pickling salt draws out the cabbage juice so it can ferment. Be sure to use a tested recipe when making sauerkraut as the proportion of salt to cabbage is key to quality kraut. Using too little salt softens the cabbage and yields a product lacking flavor. Too much salt delays the natural fermentation process.

Sauerkraut tips:

- For every 5 pounds of shredded cabbage, mix in 3 tablespoons of canning salt.
- Select a food-grade plastic pail or an old-fashioned crock in good condition to hold the cabbage. Do not use a metal container.
- Cover the cabbage with a heavy plate, or a salt water brine-filled food grade plastic bag to exclude air.
- Store the container at 68° to 74° F while fermenting. The sauerkraut should be ready in 3 to 4 weeks.
- Sauerkraut may be canned and processed in a boiling water bath or frozen.



## Half-Gallon Jars

Half-gallon jars are hard to find but they are out there. The only home food preservation foods USDA and manufacturers recommend for half-gallon jars are grape juice or apple juice.

Grape juice and apple juice are the only high acid juices safe for these large jars. Currently, there is no research for safe processing times for other juices or products in half-gallon jars.

The density of the product, water content and acid levels are the primary variables that affect safe processing times. At this time, it is not possible to determine a safe formula for other foods in large jars using the boiling water bath canner.



## Freezing Blueberries

Freeze blueberries without washing. When washed before freezing, blueberry skins become tough. To freeze, remove stems and trash. Package them tightly in freezer containers leaving ½-inch head space. Seal airtight and freeze. Another option is to freeze berries on a tray before packing into bags or boxes. This allows you to easily remove the amount you want at one time. Remove from freezer, rinse in cold water and use immediately.

Use frozen berries directly from the freezer. There is no need to thaw them if you use them in baked products, except pancakes. Pancakes may not cook thoroughly if the berries are frozen. Microwave the amount you need for a few seconds to thaw.

