



Using, Storing and Preserving Tomatoes



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Michigan Fresh: Using, Storing and Preserving Tomatoes was first published in March 2015 and revised in July 2023.

Michigan-grown tomatoes are at their prime in August and September.

Food Safety and Storage

- Wash hands before and after handling fresh produce
- Wash tomatoes using cool running water before preparing or eating.
- Store tomatoes at room temperature. You can place ripe tomatoes in the refrigerator’s vegetable crisper. You do not need to bag them. Ripe tomatoes will usually keep 2 to 3 days in the refrigerator.
- If tomatoes need to ripen, place them in a loosely closed paper bag at room temperature. Check daily.
- Select only disease-free, preferably vine-ripened, firm fruit for canning. Slicing varieties are good choices for making juice and crushed and whole tomato products. Paste tomatoes are good for making sauce, ketchup and purees. Yellow tomatoes are not really any lower in acid than red; they contain more sugar and, therefore, have a sweeter taste.
- For best quality and nutritive value, preserve only what your family can consume in 12 months.



How to Preserve

Acidification: Whole, crushed or juiced tomatoes **must be** acidified to ensure a safe home-canned product. To acidify, add 2 tablespoons of bottled lemon juice or ½ teaspoon of citric acid per quart of tomatoes. For pints, use 1 tablespoon bottled lemon juice or ¼ teaspoon citric acid. You can add lemon juice or citric acid directly to the jars before filling with the product. Add sugar to recipes to offset acid taste, if desired. Instead of lemon juice or citric acid, you may use 4 tablespoons of a 5-percent acidity vinegar per quart. However, vinegar may cause an undesirable flavor change.

Canning

Caution: Do not can tomatoes from dead or frost-killed vines because they have a high microbial load that you don’t want to consume. Green tomatoes are more acidic than ripened fruit. You may can them safely with any of the following recommendations.

Tomatoes – whole or halved – no added liquid

Raw Pack – Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Then dip in cold water, slip off skins and remove cores. Leave whole or halve and trim off any bruised or discolored areas. Add bottled lemon juice or citric acid to jars (see acidification directions given previously).

Add ½ teaspoon salt to each pint jar; 1 teaspoon salt to each quart, if desired. Fill hot jars with raw tomatoes, pressing until spaces between them fill with juice. Leave ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles; adjust headspace if needed. Wipe jar rims with clean paper towel, adjust lids and process (see tables that follow for recommended processing times).

Yield

One pound	=	3 medium tomatoes 2 cups chopped tomatoes
2½ to 3 pounds	=	2 pints canned tomatoes
14 pounds	=	9 pints, crushed or juice
1 bushel	=	17 to 20 quarts of crushed or 15 to 18 quarts juice

Lawn or garden questions?

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Recommended process time (in minutes) for whole or halved tomatoes (packed raw without added liquid) in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of			
		1 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 3,000 ft	3,001 – 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Raw	Pints or quarts	85	90	95	100

Recommended process time (in minutes) for whole or halved tomatoes (packed raw without added liquid) in a dial-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of			
			0 – 2,000 ft	2,001 – 4,000 ft	4,001 – 6,000 ft	6,001 – 8,000 ft
Raw	Pints or quarts	40	6 lb.	7 lb.	8 lb.	9 lb.
		25	11 lb.	12 lb.	13 lb.	14 lb.

Recommended process time (in minutes) for whole or halved tomatoes (packed raw without added liquid) in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of	
			0 – 1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Raw	Pints or quarts	40	5 lb.	10 lb.
		25	10 lb.	15 lb.
		15	15 lb.	Not recommended

Let jars sit undisturbed for 12 to 24 hours, check lids to be sure they've sealed, remove rings, wash jars, date, label and store. Food in jars that do not seal must be reprocessed in a clean jar with a new lid within 24 hours, refrigerated or frozen.

Tables were adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP), *Selecting, Preparing and Canning Tomatoes: Whole or Halved Tomatoes (Packed Raw Without Added Liquid)*, reviewed February 2018 (https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_03/tomato_without_liquid.html). The NCHFP adapted them from the *Complete Guide to Home Canning* (Agriculture Information Bulletin, No. 539). USDA, 2015.

Tomatoes – crushed (with no added liquid)

Hot Pack – Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Then dip in cold water, slip off skins and remove cores. Trim off any bruised or discolored portions and quarter.

Heat about one pound of the tomato quarters in a large pot, crushing them with a wooden spoon as they are added to the pot. Stir tomatoes to prevent burning. Once the tomatoes are boiling, gradually add remaining quartered tomatoes, stirring

constantly. The remaining tomatoes do not need to be crushed; they will soften with heating and stirring. Bring tomatoes to a boil and boil gently for 5 minutes. Add bottled lemon juice or citric acid to jars (see acidification directions given previously). Add ½ teaspoon salt to each pint jar; 1 teaspoon salt to each quart, if desired. Fill hot jars with hot tomatoes, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles; adjust headspace if needed. Wipe jar rims with clean paper towel, adjust lids and process (see tables that follow for recommended processing times).

Recommended process time (in minutes) for crushed tomatoes in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of			
		1 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 3,000 ft	3,001 – 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Pints	35	40	45	50
	Quarts	45	50	55	60

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Recommended process time (in minutes) for crushed tomatoes in a dial-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of			
			0 – 2,000 ft	2,001 – 4,000 ft	4,001 – 6,000 ft	6,001 – 8,000 ft
Hot	Pints or quarts	20	6 lb.	7 lb.	8 lb.	9 lb.
		15	11 lb.	12 lb.	13 lb.	14 lb.

Recommended process time (in minutes) for crushed tomatoes in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of	
			0 – 1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Hot	Pints or quarts	20	5 lb.	10 lb.
		15	10 lb.	15 lb.
		10	15 lb.	Not recommended

Let jars sit undisturbed for 12 to 24 hours, check lids to be sure they've sealed, remove rings, wash jars, date, label and store. Food in jars that do not seal must be reprocessed in a clean jar with a new lid within 24 hours, refrigerated or frozen.

Tables were adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP), *Selecting, Preparing and Canning Tomatoes: Crushed Tomatoes (With No Liquid Added)*, reviewed February 2018 (https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_03/tomato_crushed.html). The NCHFP adapted them from the *Complete Guide to Home Canning* (Agriculture Information Bulletin, No. 539). USDA, 2015.

Freezing

You may freeze tomatoes whole, sliced, chopped or pureed. In recipes, do not try to substitute frozen tomatoes for fresh tomatoes. Freezing causes their texture to become mushy. Season tomatoes before serving rather than before freezing. Freezing may either strengthen or weaken seasonings such as garlic, onion and herbs.

Freezing whole tomatoes with peels

Select firm, ripe tomatoes with stems removed. Wash each tomato with water. Rub its surface, rinse it with running water and dry it with a paper towel. Place the tomatoes on cookie sheets and freeze. You do not need to blanch them before freezing. Once frozen, transfer them from cookie sheets into freezer bags or other containers. Seal, label, date and freeze.

Freezing peeled tomatoes

Wash tomatoes as directed previously and then dip into boiling water for about 1 minute or until skins split. Remove tomatoes from boiling water, and immediately place them in ice water. Peel off skins, freeze whole or in pieces. Place into

freezer bags or containers leaving 1-inch headspace, seal, label, date and freeze.

References:

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- Michigan State University Extension. (2022). *How much should I buy? A guide to fresh fruits and vegetables for home cooking*. https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/how_much_should_i_buy
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