



Freezing, Canning & Cooking with Tomatoes

What a difference a year makes! Cool temperatures giving way to late blight all but destroyed most tomato crops in the Midwest last year. This year, in comparison, seems like a bumper crop! Time for BLT's! Bring on those juicy, mouth-watering tomatoes and let's savor every bite making up for last year's loss.



Right now, my refrigerator is filling up and we can't keep up with the pace that I am picking the tomatoes. What a problem! Canning when the temperatures are 90°+ doesn't seem like a viable option so I prefer to freeze the excess bounty and not much else is this simple.

However you choose to use them, wash by holding under cool running water. Putting them in a sink filled with water can lead to problems if your sink has any lingering bacteria.

The easiest way to freeze them is to leave them whole, core and freeze on a cookie sheet. When frozen solid, transfer to a plastic bag or container. NO blanching required. Can it get any easier? This also eliminates the problem of constantly canning since tomatoes don't seem to all ripen at the same time. When ready to use, remove from the freezer and add to your recipe. If you prefer the skins removed, you can plunge them into boiling water for 30 seconds until the skins split, run under cold water, remove skins and then freeze. But, again the temperature of the kitchen goes up. Or, when you are ready to use them, run the frozen tomato under warm tap water and peel the skins at that time. They obviously won't be suitable for slicing but you can fill your house with the aroma of a wonderful pasta sauce in January while you watch it snow outside and plan your garden for next year.

If you prefer to can tomatoes, pH is important to avoid botulism. Generally, add 2 tablespoons of lemon juice or ½ tsp. of citric acid per quart of tomatoes. This helps insure that the tomatoes are acidic enough to avoid any food borne illness. A hot water bath can be used but pressure canning is preferred.

Tomatoes can be dried using clean non-metallic screening or one of the dehydrating machines. Follow the instructions that come with the dehydrator. Realize that they have a high water content and will take awhile to dry.

As trendy and expensive as dried tomatoes in oil are, it is not recommended to preserve them like this with home methods. There is a chance botulism could be trapped in a water molecule and then encapsulated by the oil. Later on, botulism can rear its ugly

head. If you do dry them, layer the tomatoes with oil and keep in the refrigerator versus canning.

My favorite way to eat tomatoes is sliced. Add salt and pepper or a little feta with balsamic vinegar and basil. My grandmother taught me to eat them sprinkled with cinnamon sugar. Don't turn your nose up, it's quite good. If you want something a little more complex, here are a few recipes to help you enjoy this year's harvest.

Tomato Panade

*Taken from Tomato, by Gail Harland and Sofia Larrinua-Craxton
DK Publishing, New York, 2009.*

3 large onions, thinly sliced
2 Tbsp. olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
8 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped and crushed to a paste with a little salt
½ fresh red chili pepper, seeded and finely chopped
4 ripe plum tomatoes, coarsely chopped
1 14-oz baguette, sliced into ¼" slices
1 ¼ lb. Large ripe round tomatoes, cut into slices
handful of fresh basil leaves, coarsely torn
¼ c. Parmesan, freshly grated
4 oz. Sliced mozzarella cheese
1 ¼ c. hot chicken stock
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

- Preheat oven to 350°F.
- Heat 2 Tbsp. olive oil in large skillet over medium heat.
- Gently cook onions 10-15 minutes until just beginning to brown.
- Add garlic paste and chile. Cook an additional 10-15 minutes stirring frequently.
- Add chopped plum tomatoes, adding a little water if mixture appears to dry.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Oil a 2 qt. baking dish.
- Line bottom of pan with half of the baguette slices arranged closely together.
- Sprinkle with a little olive oil, then spread half of the onion/tomato mixture on top.
- Layer with half of the sliced tomatoes, top with half of the basil leaves.
- Sprinkle with half of the Parmesan.
- Repeat the layering process ending with the Parmesan.
- Top with mozzarella slices, and drizzle stock over the top.
- Bake 40-45 minutes until the top is crusty and golden.
- Cool 5 minutes before serving.

Creamy Roasted Tomato Sauce for Pasta

- Wash tomatoes and slice. Small tomatoes such as Roma or cherry should be cut in half.
- Place in a bowl and drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
- Place tomatoes in single layer on cookie sheet lined with foil or parchment paper.
- Mince a few cloves of garlic and sprinkle over tomatoes.
- For extra flavor, chop a handful of your favorite herbs and sprinkle on tomatoes. Basil, oregano, rosemary, thyme are all good choices.
- Roast in a 275°F oven for about 3 hours until edges are just starting to darken.
- Remove from oven.
- Place 1 qt. heavy cream in a saucepan over moderate heat making sure not to scorch it.
- Add roasted tomatoes (at least 6 tomatoes worth) and blend with a hand held immersion blender until smooth.
- Continue to cook until mixture is slightly reduced in volume and thickened.
- Pour over your favorite cooked pasta.



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