



Alletta Schadler, Lebanon County Extension home economist, demonstrates making salsa, dried tomatoes, tomato soup, and tomato sauce.

## Dried Tomatoes, Salsa, And Other Tomato Favorites

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — The acidity in tomatoes varies and this means some of your old recipes may no longer be suitable for canning. In addition, new tomato favorites are gaining popularity.

An update on tomato preserving methods and new recipes was held recently at the Lebanon County Extension Office.

Alletta Schadler, Lebanon County Extension home economist, demonstrated making salsa, dried tomatoes, tomato soup, and tomato sauce.

It is important to remember that the type of tomato used affects the quality of salsa, sauces, and tomato dishes.

Paste tomatoes, such as Roma, have firmer flesh and produce thicker salsa, soups, and pastes than large slicing tomatoes.

### Tips From Letti

- To make a quality product, it is important that you start with high quality ingredients. Tomatoes should be ripe and skins should not be broken.

- Cracks in the skin can give a sour taste to the tomato and ruin a whole batch of sauce or salsa.

- Do not use tomatoes from dead or frost-killed vines.

- To easily remove skins, dip tomatoes in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds. Dump into cold water, and slip off skins.

- When cutting up tomatoes, do not expose to the air as pectin breaks down. This results in tomato solids and water separating. To produce a top quality juice, crush a few in the bottom of kettle, cut in remaining tomatoes while tomatoes are cooking. This results in a higher quality product.

- Use Clear Jel (modified food starch) to thicken tomato paste.

- Use Wonda Flour to thicken sauces and gravies, because it dissolves easily and does not need to be cooked ahead of time.

- Roma tomatoes are best for soup and sauces.

- Do not turn canning lids too tightly or they will not seal.

- To seed individual tomatoes, cut in half and insert finger in each corner of half to squeeze out seeds and excess juice.

- For free recipes and instructions

for freezing and canning tomatoes, ask your county extension office or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Lebanon Co. Cooperative Extension, 2120 Cornwall Rd., Suite 1, Lebanon, PA 17042. For more information, call (717) 270-4391.

### Salsa

Here are some tips about salsa. Salsa is a mixture of low-acid foods, such as onions and peppers, with acid foods such as tomatoes.

Roma tomatoes work best for salsa.

Peppers range from mild to fiery in taste. Do not increase the total amount of peppers in any recipe but you may substitute one type of pepper for another. Generally, the smaller the pepper, the fierier the taste. Peppers provide a distinct taste to salsas. Choose a mild pepper when the recipe calls for long green chiles. Some popular hot peppers are Jalapeno, Serrano, Cayenne, Habanero, Tabasco.

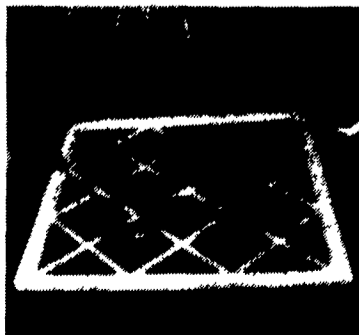
Always wear plastic or rubber gloves while handling hot chilis. Remove skins of chiles by heating chiles until skins blister. After heating, place peppers in pan and cover with a damp cloth, which makes peeling easier. Let cool several minutes; slip off skins. Discard seeds and chop.

Acid ingredients help preserve salsa. If you are canning salsa, you must add acid because the natural acidity may not be high enough. Canned lemon juice is a good choice. Vinegar must be at least 5 percent acid if used.

Spices add flavoring. Use more if you prefer spicy salsas. Leave them out completely if you prefer a mild taste.

To can, follow the manufacturer's directions for pretreating lids. Fill hot clean jars with hot salsa. Wipe jar rims with a clean, damp paper towel before screwing on lids and metal bands.

(Turn to Page B15)



Tomatoes may be dried in a food dehydrator to imitate sun-dried tomatoes.

### GOURMET DRIED TOMATOES

Sun dried tomatoes are a popular delicacy but so expensive — \$10 to \$20 per pound.

Most sun dried tomatoes are imported from Italy, who first introduced them to the U.S. market. Unfortunately, the climate is not suitable for trying tomatoes in this area, but you can achieve a close imitation by using a food dehydrator. Make sure your dehydrator has a fan and a thermostat for successful drying.

Start with high quality Roma or plum-shaped tomatoes. The Roma varieties contain as much as 15 percent seeds compared to only 6 percent in round tomatoes.

Some common varieties of plum-shaped tomatoes are Red Pear, Roma VF, LaRoma, Del Oro, San Marzano, Hungarian Italian, Viva Italia, and Super Italian Paste — the meaties of all sweet, flavorful, and frequently up to 6 inches long.

Not all tomatoes can be dried successfully. Tomatoes low in acid may develop black spots during the drying process. The black spots do not represent spoilage but result in a slight change in flavor and are certainly not as appetizing as the fully red, robust dried tomato.

Wash tomatoes carefully and halve them lengthwise. Set the halves on drying racks with the cut sides up, close together, but not overlapping. If desired, sprinkle lightly with salt. Paste tomatoes will take about 10 to 15 hours to dry in a dehydrator at 140 degrees. If you're drying round tomatoes, slice 1/4 to 1/2 -inch thick. When dry, they will be paper thin. If you slice them thinner, they will be difficult to remove from the drying racks.

To store dried tomatoes, package in freezer bags and then inside an airtight glass jar. Store in refrigerator or freezer until needed.

Do not chop or flake them until ready to use. When making tomato flakes or chunks, put the dried tomatoes in a food processor and chop to desired size.

Schadler recommends the cookbook "How To Dry Foods" by Deanna DeLong. It costs \$14.95, and can be purchased at bookstores.

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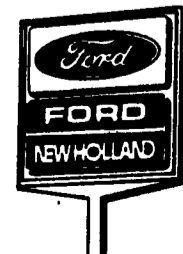
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