

Tomatoes For Every Taste

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Lancaster (Lancaster Co.) — With more than 2,000 tomato varieties, choosing a tomato can be downright confusing. Some types are better for eating, some for canning, and some for cooking.

To help sort out the tomato dilemma, Lancaster Extension held a Totally Tomato Workshop.

Tim Elkner, Lancaster County horticulture agent, displayed the 44 varieties grown in test gardens, and Nancy Wiker, gave the latest update on canning and cooking tomatoes. In addition, she prepared several tasty recipes using tomatoes for workshop participants to sample.

Tomatoes, according to Elkner, have different purposes. Many of the older varieties can seldom be found. This isn't because they lacked flavor but because they were thin skinned and don't ship well.

A table display of tomatoes showed that tomatoes come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. Clear lemon colors, orange and pink shades to deep reds, grape-shaped, round shapes, oval types, from berry size to softball size.

While big juicy tomatoes are great for slicing and eating raw, they aren't the type best suited for canning and cooking. Too much juice. Roma types work better for canning.

"Many varieties have interesting stories behind their names," Elkner said. He introduced one variety called the "mortgage lifter." So named because the nicely-round, pink-toned tomato paid off the farm for one farmer who substitute that variety in place of growing tobacco.

A common problem with tomatoes are dropping off the vine before they are mature. If tomatoes drop off the vine before they are mature, Elkner said, it is probably deficient in calcium. Solve that by keeping the plants evenly watered to prevent cells from breaking down and fungus from entering the plant.

Early tomatoes tend to be small in size. Elkner said, "Some don't taste that good, but they

taste better than the store-bought varieties if you're hungry for a real tomato after a long winter."

Yellow tomatoes are milder and don't have a strong tomato flavor. The deeper gold-colored, the higher it is in carotene," Elkner said.

Wiker cautioned that yellow tomatoes do not contain as much acid as the red varieties and therefore must be preserved differently.

To ensure safe acidity in whole, crushed, or juiced tomatoes, add two tablespoons bottled lemon juice or 1/2 teaspoon citric acid per quart of tomatoes. For pints, use 1 tablespoon bottled lemon juice or 1/4 teaspoon citric acid. Sugar to taste may be added to offset acid taste.

Citric acid is available at drug stores.

Although vinegar does provide acid, it is not recommended in canning tomatoes because it produces a sour taste.

Although freezing tomatoes is acceptable, it is not recommended because they become limp after thawing. If you do freeze tomatoes, skins should be removed before freezing because they become tough.

When canning, be sure to use canning jars such as Ball or Kerr. A European catalog offers unique-shaped jars but these are not approved by the USDA because of problems with breakage and loose seals.

Some recipes for tomatoes follow, but check with your county extension office for more recipes and for in-depth instructions on preserving tomatoes and turning them into juice, salsa, spaghetti sauce, ketchup, and other dishes.

Spaghetti Sauce Without Meat

- 30 pounds tomatoes
- 1 cup onions, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup celery or green pepper, chopped
- 1 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced (optional)
- 4-1/2 teaspoons salt



Tim Elkner holds up a tomato named the "mortgage lifter," named for its popularity in enabling a farmer to pay off his mortgage from successful sales of the pink-shaded tomato.



Nancy Wiker demonstrates the correct method of preserving tomato dishes. Because there are so many different varieties, the canning process has been changed recently to ensure food safety.

- 2 tablespoons oregano
- 4 tablespoons parsley, minced
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- Yield — About nine pints

Do not increase the proportion of onions, peppers, or mushrooms. Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Dip in cold water and slip off skins. Remove cores and quarter tomatoes. Boil 20 minutes, uncovered, in large saucepan. Squeeze out juice with a food mill or sieve. Saute onions, garlic, celery or peppers, and

mushrooms (if desired) in vegetable oil until tender. Combine sauteed vegetables and tomatoes and add remainder of spices, salt, and sugar. Bring to boil. Simmer, uncovered, until thick enough for serving. At this time the initial volume will have been reduced by nearly one-half. Stir frequently to avoid burning. Fill jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process jars as described in pressure canner 25 minutes.

Procedure for making sauce with meat. Saute 2-1/2 pounds of ground beef or sausage until brown. Using the recipe for making sauce without meat, add the quantities specified for garlic, onion, celery or green pepper, and mushrooms. Cook until vegetables are tender. Combine sauteed meat and vegetables with the tomato juice. Process in pressure canner 70 minutes.

Hot Barbecue Sauce

- 2-1/2 to 3 pounds chili peppers
- 30 pounds tomatoes
- 3 cups onions, chopped
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon oregano
- 1/2 cup vinegar (five percent)
- Yield — About nine pints

Caution: Wear rubber gloves while handling chilies or wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your face.

Wash and dry chilies. Slit the sides of peppers and peel them using one of the following methods:

Oven or broiler method: Place chilies in oven (400°F) or broiler six to eight minutes until skins blister.

Range-top method: Cover hot burner, either gas or electric, with heavy wire mesh. Place chilies on burner for several minutes until skins blister.

Allow peppers to cool. Place in a pan and cover with a damp cloth. This will make peeling the peppers easier. After several minutes, peel each pepper. Cool and slip off skins. Discard seeds and chop peppers. If desired, leave skins on and grind or coarsely chop peppers. Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Dip in cold water, slip off skins, and remove cores. Coarsely chop tomatoes and combine chopped peppers and remaining ingredients in a large kettle. Bring to a boil. Simmer, uncovered, two to three hours or until the initial volume is reduced by one-third to one-half. Stir frequently to avoid burning. Fill jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process in pressure canner 25 minutes.

Tomato Ketchup

- 24 pounds ripe tomatoes
- 3 cups onions, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon ground red pepper (cayenne)
- 3 cups cider vinegar (five percent)
- 4 teaspoons whole cloves
- 3 sticks cinnamon, crushed
- 1-1/2 teaspoon whole allspice
- 3 tablespoons celery seeds
- 1-1/2 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup salt
- Yield — six to seven pints

Wash tomatoes. Dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Dip in cold water. Slip off skins and remove cores. Quarter tomatoes into four-gallon stock pot or a large kettle. Add onions and red peppers. Bring to

a boil and simmer uncovered for 20 minutes. Combine spices in a spice bag and add vinegar in a two-quart saucepan. Bring to boil. Cover, turn off heat and hold tomato mixture 20 minutes. Then, remove spice bag and combine vinegar and tomato mixture. Boil about 30 minutes. Put boiled mixture through a food mill or sieve. Return to pot. Add sugar and salt, boil gently, and stir frequently until volume is reduced by one-half or until mixture rounds up on spoon without separation. Fill pint jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process in boiling water canner 15 minutes.

Blender Ketchup

- 24 pounds ripe tomatoes
- 2 pounds onions
- 1 pound sweet red peppers
- 1 pound sweet green peppers
- 9 cups vinegar (five percent)
- 9 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup canning or pickling salt
- 3 tablespoons dry mustard
- 1-1/2 tablespoons ground red pepper
- 1-1/2 teaspoons whole allspice
- 1-1/2 tablespoons whole cloves
- 3 three-inch sticks of cinnamon
- Yield — nine pints

Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Then dip in cold water, slip off skins, core, and quarter. Remove seeds from peppers and slice into strips. Peel and quarter onions. Blend tomatoes, peppers, and onions at high speed for five seconds in electric blender. Pour into a three- to four-gallon stock pot or large kettle and heat. Boil gently 60 minutes, stirring frequently. Add vinegar, sugar, salt, and a spice bag containing dry mustard, red pepper, and other spices. Continue boiling and stirring until volume is reduced on-half and ketchup rounds up on a spoon with no separation of liquid and solids. Remove spice bag and fill jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process jars in boiling water canner 15 minutes.