

Processing Tomatoes



San Marzano tomatoes from my garden

You need lots of tomatoes

Back in early June, after harvesting the San Marzano tomatoes from my garden (thank you, [Whitfill Nursery](#)), I made fresh tomato sauce. However, I did not process it with the hot bath canning method, but froze the fresh sauce in individual zip-loc bags. Recently, when my friend, Rick said his tomato source has 50 lbs. of tomatoes available, I willingly said yes, not knowing what I was getting myself into.



50 lbs. of Roma tomatoes

The thought never crossed my mind what 50 lbs. of tomatoes looks like, but it is a lot. But there is nothing better than having a fresh batch of sauce from summer tomatoes in the middle of winter. Because of the volume of tomatoes, I will need to process them using the hot bath method.

Safety First

The last time I used the hot bath method in making tomato sauce a few years ago, I badly burned my hand (all my own fault). So I am a little wary making it this time.



But, like with most things, your memory dulls and my desire to have fresh tomato sauce overrode my fear of burning myself again. If you have never processed food for long term storage, it is a good thing to know. Especially after the events of this year. When the food supply is challenged, having a pantry

filled with your homemade goodies is a comforting thought. And now is the time to do it with the summer's bounty available.



There are several recipes available for making tomato sauce, but I love using the simple one from my friend, Rick. With only 4 ingredients~tomatoes, garlic, olive oil and salt, you have a great tasting sauce.

Enlist Helpers

Before you start a project like this, you may want to consider inviting your friends over to help. This is not a one-person project, nor do I suggest you do this with your spouse. There is a reason the women from the farm would gather and do this as a collective group. It is repetitive, time-consuming work but made faster with great conversation and friendship.

Get the Right equipment



Get the proper size jar

It is important to have the right tools on hand too. Since you are working with sterilized jars and tops, boiling water and hot sauce, you need equipment to help. You can purchase jars from Walmart or through Amazon. Determine what size jar you will need (all depends on how many servings you want per jar). For 16 oz. jars, click [here](#); 8 oz. jars, click [here](#); and for complete canning kits, click [here](#).



Processing tomatoes the wrong way can have serious side effects. There is much debate about safely canning tomatoes and you want to make sure you take all precautions in doing so. Sterilization of jars, hot bathing them for the proper amount of time, adding acidity for an extra level of

protection are few things to know before getting started. Make sure you have a large stockpot. If not, here is a [link](#) to one.



Large pot needed

Making the Sauce

For a quick summary on making the sauce, you stem, core and cut the tomato into 16 pieces. I add an extra step here, where I wipe away most of the seeds out of the tomato before I cut it into pieces. In the meantime, slightly cook the garlic in olive oil and then add the tomatoes and salt.



Cook the tomatoes for 15-20 minutes, until the skins separate from the tomatoes.

Here is where I deviate from the recipe. Instead of using a food mill, I put the tomatoes into a Cuisinart and reduce them to sauce. I skip the step about refrigerating it overnight (I don't have the space for this much sauce), but pour the sauce into sterilized jars.



I like this device which sits on the jar, because the mouth is wide and the sauce funnels right in; and it has a measuring device on the side so you don't overfill. I leave a 1/2 inch space at the top.

Safety guidelines recommend adding an additional acid to the top of the tomato sauce before you process it. Your choices are citric acid or bottled lemon juice. For citric acid powder, click [here](#).



Getting Ready to Hot Bath

Next, wiping down the rim of the jar will ensure your lid seals properly.



Now the jar is ready to go into the hot bath. Again, proceed with caution as you are putting something heavy into boiling water.



I submerge the jars and simmer for 40 minutes.



You know when you have sealed the jars correctly, as the center button in the lid will pop down as the jar cools. It is rather satisfying to hear pop, pop, pop as all the lids complete the seal.



Whether you decide to can tomatoes or not, below is Rick's recipe using 3 lbs. of tomatoes and it is worth making.

It is also possible to process certain foods with the oven method (jams, especially). To see that process, click [here](#) to see how I made fig preserves.

Since we really don't know what the supply chain will be over the holidays, tomato sauce or other homemade preserved foods will be a wonderful gift. So if you have access to an abundance of fruits or vegetables, think about canning them for yourself or your friends.

I hope you have some fun plans this weekend. Happily I am up at the cabin again appreciating the cooler mountain temps. The plan is to do some painting (on canvas), and get some biking or walking in. Enjoy!

Mary

Rick's Tomato Sauce

This recipe uses 4 ingredients and makes the most delicious tomato sauce

- 6 TBSP olive oil (extra virgin)
- 1 TBSP minced garlic
- 3 lbs Ripe plum (Roma) tomatoes (stemmed, cored and cut into pieces (16 pieces))
- 2 tsp Kosher salt

1. Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add garlic and cook 20 seconds until fragrant (do not brown). Stir in tomatoes and salt. Raise heat and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer vigorously, stirring frequently, until sauce has thickened slightly and tomato skins are starting to separate from flesh, 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Pass sauce through the medium disc of a food mill. Discard skin and seeds. Return the milled sauce to the pot. Bring to a vigorous simmer and reduce by half for a thick sauce.
3. Let sauce sit (overnight in refrigerator is best). Bring to room temperature and skim off any floating olive oil (the tomato oil is great for other uses).
4. Season with additional salt to taste. The sauce is ready to serve and can be seasoned with oregano, red pepper flakes or basil.

Recipe can easily be multiplied given the amount of

tomatoes available and the size of the pot.

Sauce freezes well and is suitable for wet bath canning.

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