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How to Make Fresh Tomato Paste with a Water Bath Canner!

Yield: About 9 half-pint jars

Making canned tomato paste is something easy to do and will make your tomato dishes taste so much better. Home-canned tomato paste have been a tradition for many generations. In the middle of the winter, you can use the tomato paste to make a fresh spaghetti sauce, lasagna, chili, or other tomato-based meals for that fresh garden taste.



Here's how to do it, in easy steps and completely illustrated. This method is so easy, ANYONE can do this! It's a great thing to do with your kids!

Ingredients

- **Tomatoes** - 8 quarts peeled, cored chopped tomatoes (about 4 dozen large tomatoes) - best to use Roma type / paste tomatoes
- **Red peppers** - 1½ cups chopped sweet red peppers (about 3 whole peppers)
- **Bay** - 2 bay leaves
- **Salt** - 1 teaspoon canning or pickling salt (optional)
- **Garlic** - 1 clove garlic (optional)
- **lemon juice** - fresh or bottled, about 1/2 cup

Equipment

- **1 Water bath Canner** (a huge pot to sterilize the jars after filling (about \$30 to \$35 - \$30 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores. Note: we sell many sizes and types of canners for all types of stoves and needs - see [canning supplies](#)). Tomatoes are on the border between the high-acid fruits that can be preserved in a boiling-water bath and the low-acid fruits, vegetables and meats that need pressure canning
- **1 large pot** (to scald the tomatoes, step 3) and **1 medium sized pot** to heat the tomato juice or water to add to the jars (step 6) and **1 small pot** to sterilize the lids.
- **8 ounce (half pint) canning jars** (Ball or Kerr jars can be found at Publix, Kroger, Safeway and local "big box" stores - about \$8 per dozen jars including the lids and rings). Be sure to get wide mouth jars to be able to get all of the paste out later! Half Pint size works best!
- **Lids** - thin, flat, round metal lids with a gum binder that seals them against the top of the jar. They may only be used once.
- **Rings** - metal bands that secure the lids to the jars. They may be reused many times.
- **Jar grabber** (to pick up the hot jars)
- **Lid lifter** (has a magnet to pick the lids out of the boiling water where you sterilize them. (\$2 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores, but it's usually cheaper online from our affiliates)
- **Jar funnel** (\$3-Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes even hardware stores)
- **Large spoons and ladles**

Process / Directions - How to Make Home Canned Tomato Paste from Fresh Tomatoes

Step 1 - Selecting the tomatoes

It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality tomatoes!

At right is a picture of tomatoes from my garden - they are so much better than anything from the grocery store. And if you don't have enough, a pick-you-own farm is the place to go! At right are 4 common varieties that will work:



The picture at right shows the best variety of tomato to use, in the bottom left corner: Roma; also called paste tomatoes. They have fewer sides, thicker, meatier walls, and MUCH less water. And that means thicker paste in less cooking time!

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Top left: Beefsteak | Top right: Lemon Boy, yellow |
| Bottom left: Roma, paste- type | Bottom right: Better Boy |

Step 2 - Get the jars and lids sterilizing





The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sterilize" cycle. I get that going while I'm preparing everything else, so it's done by the time I'm ready to fill the jars. If you don't have a dishwasher, submerge the jars in a large pot (the canner itself) of water and bring it to a boil.

Be sure to let it go through the rinse cycle to get rid of any soap!

Get the canner heating up

Fill the canner about 1/2 full of water and start it heating (with the lid on).

Get a the medium pot of water or tomato juice heating

This is also a good time to get your 1 quart of tomato juice and/or water boiling (you will use it to fill any air spaces in the jars in step 6).



Start the water for the lids



Put the lids into the small pot of boiling water for at least several minutes. Note: everything gets sterilized in the water bath (step 7) anyway, so this just helps to ensure there is no spoilage later!)



Step 3 - Removing the tomato skins

Here's a trick you may not know: put the tomatoes, a few at a time in a large pot of boiling water for no more than 1 minute (30 - 45 seconds is usually enough)



then....

Plunge them into a waiting bowl of ice water.

This makes the skins slide right off of the tomatoes! If you leave the skins in, they become tough and chewy in the paste, not very pleasant.



Step 4 - Removing the skins, bruises and tough parts

The skins should practically slide off the tomatoes. Then you can cut the tomatoes in quarters and remove the tough part around the stem and any bruised or soft parts.



Why remove the skins? They become tough when you cook them! Some people use a juicer or a blender to puree the whole tomatoes (minus stems) and then cook the resultant juice down. Due to the extra juice, it will take much longer to cook down to a thick paste, but there's nothing wrong with that approach.

Step 5 - Removing seeds and water

After you have peeled the skins off the tomatoes, cut the tomatoes in half. Now we need to remove the seeds and excess water.

Step 6 - Squeeze of the seeds and water

Just like it sounds: wash your hands then squeeze each tomato and use your finger or a spoon to scoop and shake out most of the seeds. You don't need to get fanatical about it; removing just most will do.



Step 7 - Drain the tomatoes

Toss the squeezed (Squozen? :) tomatoes into a colander or drainer, while you work on others. This helps more of the water to drain off.

Note You may want to save the liquid: if you then pass it through a sieve, screen or cheesecloth, you have fresh tomato juice; great to drink cold or use in cooking! By draining the water off now, you'll end up with a thicker paste in less cooking time! And that preserves vitamins (and your sanity).



This is a good time to chop the red peppers!

Step 8 - Blend the tomatoes in a blender, food processor or chopper

If you want really smooth tomato paste, just pour the tomatoes into blender, food processor or even a chopper, and blend until it is smooth.

Step 9 - Combine and bring the paste to a gentle simmer

Combine the tomatoes and

- 1½ cups chopped sweet red peppers
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon canning or pickling salt (optional)

in a big pot. There's generally no need to add liquid, most types of tomatoes have so much water, we will need to boil it down to drive off much of the water to

thicken the paste. Simmer slowly in large-diameter saucepan for 1 hour. **(TIP: A crockpot set on "high" will work great and doesn't require constant attention-**



but be sure to check it and stir every 15 minutes - or turn it to low and stir once every hour or so.). Press through a fine sieve. Add the garlic clove, if desired. Continue cooking slowly until thick enough to round up on a spoon, about 2½ hours in MY crockpot (obviously, with the lid either off, or askew, so the steam can escape). I cannot tell you how long it will take in YOUR crockpot. Yours might be 40 years old and use a light bulb from an Easy Bake Oven to power it! (Can you tell I've had emails from people who said it took 10 hours in their crockpot and were puzzled?)

Stir frequently to prevent sticking. Remove garlic clove and bay leaves.

Step 10 - Fill the jars with paste

Fill them to almost within ¼-inch of the top, seat the lid and hand-tighten the ring around them.



NOTE: if you want to freeze the paste instead, just let the paste cool to room temperature, then fill your freezer containers (I like Ziploc freezer bags in the quart size), fill them completely, eliminate air pockets, seal them and pop them in the freezer. You're done!

Step 11 - Add lemon juice and liquid

After you fill each jar with tomatoes, add 1 teaspoon of lemon juice per half pint jar or 2 teaspoons of lemon juice per pint jar. This helps to reduce the odds of spoilage and to retain color and flavor. Then make sure it is filled to ¼-inch of the top with paste.



Step 12 - Put the lids and rings on

Just screw them on snugly, not too tight. If there is any tomato on the surface of the lip of the jar, wipe it off first with a clean dry cloth or paper towel.

Be sure the contact surfaces (top of the jar and underside of the ring) are clean to get a good seal!



Step 13 - Boil the jars in the water bath canner

Put them in the canner and keep them covered with at least 1 inch of water. Keep the water boiling. Process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 45 minutes for half-pint or pint jars. Larger jars are not recommended, but you may use smaller jars at the same processing duration.

Remember to adjust the time if you are at a different altitude other than sea level! Pressure canners work better for tomato paste and other low acid foods - you'll get less spoilage with a pressure canner.

I prefer a pressure canner as the higher temperatures and shorter cooking time result in better flavor and less spoilage. For more information or to order one, click on [Pressure Canners](#). The recipe and directions for pressure canning tomatoes are coming.



| Recommended process time for Tomato Paste in a boiling-water canner. | | | | | |
|--|----------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| | | Process Time at Altitudes of | | | |
| Style of Pack | Jar Size | 0 - 1,000 ft | 1,001 - 3,000 ft | 3,001 - 6,000 ft | Above 6,000 ft |



| | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------|--------|----|----|----|
| Hot | Half-pints (8 ounce) | 45 min | 50 | 55 | 60 |
|-----|----------------------|--------|----|----|----|

Step 14 - Done

Lift the jars out of the water and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight) You can then remove the rings if you like. Once the jars are cool, you can check that they are sealed verifying that the lid has been sucked down. Just press in the center, gently, with your finger. If it pops up and down (often making a popping sound), it is not sealed. If you put the jar in the refrigerator right away, you can still use it. Some people replace the lid and reprocess the jar, then that's a bit iffy. If you heat the contents back up, re-jar them (with a new lid) and the full time in the canner, it's usually ok.

This document was adapted from the "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 1994.

Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Tomato Paste - makes 14 half pint or 7 pint jars*

| Item | Quantity | Cost in 2009 | Source | Subtotal |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| Tomatoes | 20 - 25 lbs (to make about 16 cups of prepared tomato) | free from the garden, or \$0.50 cents at a PYO | Garden | \$0.00 |
| Canning jars (pint size, wide mouth), includes lids and rings (or 14 eight ounce jars) | 7 jars | \$8.00/dozen | Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores | \$4.50 |
| Lemon juice | 7 Tablespoons (1 tablespoons per pint jar) | \$0.50 per package | Grocery stores, Publix, Kroger | \$0.50 |
| Total | | | | \$5.00 total or about \$0.71 per jar INCLUDING the jars - which you can reuse! |

* - This assumes you already have the pots, pans, ladles, and reusable equipment. Note that you can reuse the jars! Many products are sold in jars that will take the lids and rings for canning. For example, Classico Spaghetti sauce is in quart sized jars that work with Ball and Kerr lids and rings. Note that the Classico's manufacturer does not recommend reuse of their jars: [see what they have to say on this page:](#)

Answers to Common Questions

What did I do wrong if my jars spoil?

Tomatoes are a low acid fruit - adding lemon juice helps, processing at least 35 minutes in the water bath canner, or better still, using a pressure canner almost eliminates spoilage. If you don't have a pressure canner, you must boost the acid level of the paste, by adding 2 tablespoons of lemon juice or 1/2 teaspoon of citric acid per quart of paste.

The question everyone asks: Can you add meat?

With a water bath canner, absolutely, definitely **NOT**. The temperatures do not get high enough to kill the type of bacteria that can attack meat and make you sick, or even kill you. However, with a pressure canner, it IS possible. [I have complete directions here!](#) I don't do it, simply because... have you ever tasted canned meat? Yes, it is called SPAM. My recommendation is to can without the meat and add fresh browned ground meat or meatballs when you use the sauce!

I have read in other homemade spaghetti sauce recipes that you need to cook the mixture for at least 4-5 hours. Is this necessary?

I suppose if you really want to make sure that absolutely no vitamins survive, you could cook it that long! :) The only reason people used to cook tomato paste that long was the Roma paste-type tomatoes, with thicker walls, meatier with fewer seeds and less water didn't exist, so they had to cook it for hours to get rid of water and thicken it. And of course, modern sauce mixes that contain a little bit of corn starch as a thickener, also help shorten the time.

And for those who want to go strictly organic and au naturale, my method of squeezing out the excess water and seeds eliminates much of the excess juice (which you can save as tomato juice for drinking) and lets you start with a thicker tomato pulp which means much shorter cooking time!

Other Equipment:

From left to right:

1. Jar lifting tongs to pick up hot jars
2. Lid lifter - to remove lids from the pot of boiling water (sterilizing)
3. Lid - disposable - you may only use them once
4. Ring - holds the lids on the jar until after the jars cool - then you don't need them.
5. Canning jar funnel - to fill the jars and keep the rims clean.

