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How to Make and Can Homemade Ketchup from Fresh Tomatoes!

We take ketchup (or [catsup](#), if you prefer) for granted - it is everywhere and Americans use it in almost everything. Some even put it on scrambled eggs. So maybe you wondered if homemade ketchup taste any different or better? And if you have a mountain of homegrown tomatoes that are going to waste, here's your chance to make your own ketchup and customize to your own taste! Need a low-salt diet? Skip the salt! Want a spicy ketchup? Add some Tabasco or chilies. Making and canning your own ketchup is something families remember years later. No store bought ketchup compares with the taste of that made from your own tomatoes from your garden or fresh-picked from a local farm! In the middle of the winter, you can pour the ketchup on your food and taste the summer flavor of fresh tomatoes.

Here's how to do it, in easy steps and completely illustrated. This method is easy, ANYONE can do this; but it IS time consuming - I will warn you of that! And it is more complicated than spaghetti sauce, so I'd recommend trying that first. Using a crockpot to cook the tomatoes down really helps save time, though!! It's a great thing to do with your kids!

Note: I've modified this recipe to tone down the spice, so it gives it a more tomato-ey flavor. If you want the [spicier recipe, click here!](#) You may also be interested in [How to make cucumber pickle relish!](#) This is the classic hamburger relish!

Ingredients

Yield: 6 to 7 pints

- Tomatoes - about 25 lbs (yes, you need a big basketful - you remove the skins, seeds and a lot of the water, and then cook it down, so it takes a lot to start - UNLESS you are using a paste-type tomato (like Roma) that has little water - you can get by with 18 lbs of those.) You can halve or double this recipe, as needed, to match the amount of tomatoes (and time) you have!
- 3 cups of 5% apple cider vinegar.
- Your own seasonings. I haven't seen any ketchup mixes in the stores, but the seasonings are common, anyway. See below for seasonings.
 - 1 cup chopped onions
 - 1 teaspoon salt (optional - I don't put any in!)
 - 1 clove of garlic, minced
 - 1 teaspoon black pepper
 - 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
 - 1 cup sugar (white or brown) (Diabetics: yes, you could use Stevia, Splenda, Agave, Honey, etc - to taste!)

Equipment

- 1 Water bath canner (a huge pot to sanitize 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. I have a pressure canner, so I use that just to make sure there's less spoilage, but a water bath canner will work.
- Food mill or sieve - I highly recommend the Foley Food Mill - it's only about \$25. You can use an ordinary sieve, but it will take much longer.

- Pint or 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).
- 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 sanitize them. (\$2 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores, but it's usually cheaper online from our affiliates)
- 1 large pot.
- 1 saucepan
- Large spoons and ladles
- Jar funnel (\$3-Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores; sometimes even hardware stores)

Process - How to Make Ketchup (or Catsup) from Fresh Tomatoes

Step 1 - Selecting the tomatoes

It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality tomatoes! 25 pounds is a huge amount of tomatoes. Converted to prepared tomatoes (peeled, chopped, etc.) that's about 16 quarts or 4 gallons!

The easy way to measure them is to weigh yourself and an empty container on your home bathroom scale, then stand on it again holding your container of 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-your-own farm is



the pace to go! Below are 4 common varieties that will work:

Top left:
Beefsteak

Top right:
Lemon Boy,
yellow

Bottom left:
Roma, paste-
type

Bottom right:
Better Boy



The picture at left shows the best variety of tomato to use: Roma; also called paste tomatoes. they have fewer sides, thicker, meatier walls, and less water.

Also, you don't want mushy, bruised or rotten tomatoes!

Step 2 - 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 sauce, not very pleasant.

Step 3 - 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 4 - 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 5 - 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. 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!



Step 6. Seasonings

Some of the seasonings will straight into the pot with the tomatoes, the rest will go into a spice bag you make from a piece of cheesecloth. Put the tomatoes in a large pot to start simmering.

Into the pot of simmering tomatoes, put:

- 1 cup finely chopped/diced onions
- 1 teaspoon salt (optional - I don't put any in!)
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup sugar (white or brown)
(Diabetics: yes, you could use Stevia, Splenda, Agave, Honey, etc - to taste!)



Optional variations:

- add 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- and/or add 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Onto a piece of cheesecloth (about 12 inches square) put 3 tablespoons celery seed. Tie the corners of the cloth together to make a little bag (you can use a plastic twist tie - I use one from a oven browning bag) and put the bag into a small sauce pot with



- 3 cups of 5% apple cider vinegar.

Let it simmer for 30 minutes, while the tomatoes cook (you may need to add more vinegar, so you finish with 3 cups of liquid)

Step 7 - Bring the tomatoes to a gentle simmer

Cook the tomatoes for about 20 - 30 minutes over medium heat to make them mushy enough to go through your food mill or sieve.



Step 8 - Removing the seeds and skins



Run the cook tomato mixture through the food mill or sieve. Discard the seeds and skins that remain in the sieve..

Step 9 - Add the seasoned vinegar and cook down to thicken the mix

Now it's time to add the seasoned (minus the cheesecloth bag, which you cook down the mixture to thicken it. stove over low - medium heat, stirring right.. OR....



vinegar from step may now discard), and You can do it on the frequently, as shown at

.. put it into a crockpot and let it cook down by itself. this method is much easier! You should always start by setting the crock pot on low or medium heat. I would recommend starting with low heat because you do not want to risk burning it! If it doesn't get hot enough to reduce in 12 hours, bump the setting up to the next position, and watch more carefully, in case that turns out to be too hot! I find it takes about 12 hours, but each crockpot may vary. You want it to get as thick as you like your ketchup, remembering that it will also thicken a little bit after you cool it. The photo doesn't show it, but I cover with a splatter screen or the lid on loosely (so the steam can escape)



Step 10 - Get the jars and lids sanitizing

The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sanitize" cycle. I get that going about 30 minutes before I figure the ketchup has cooked down enough (yes, that's a bit vague!)

Be sure to let it go through the rinse cycle to get rid of any soap! It's also a good time to start heating up the water in the canner and the small pan of water to boil the lids.

Lids: Put the very hot (but not quite boiling; around 180 F, steaming water is fine)

water for at least several minutes.

Note: everything gets sanitized in the water bath (step 12), so this just helps to ensure there is no spoilage later!)



Step 11 - Fill the jars with the ketchup and put the lid and rings on

Fill them to within $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch of the top, seat the lid and hand-tighten the ring around them. Keep the ketchup hot in the pot, and move quickly to fill and seal the jars and get them in the canner, to avoid them cooling down.



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

Step 12 - Process (boil) the jars in the 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 35 minutes for pints and 40 minutes for quarts. Remember to adjust the time if you are at a different altitude other than sea level!

Recommended process time for Tomato Ketchup in a boiling-water canner.

Process Time at Altitudes of

Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Pints	15 min	20	25

If you have a pressure canner, be sure to follow their directions.

If you have a pressure canner, use it and process the sauce according to the directions that came with it. If you don't have these, then for 15 minutes for pint at a pressure of 10 to 11 pounds. I prefer a pressure canner or a larger 33 quarter water bath canner, shown at right - both are much deeper, so there is no mess, no boilovers, and allows you to cover the tallest jars with several inches of water to ensure safety! To order one, click on [Canning supplies](#) and select the canner that is right for your stove (regular or flat bottomed for glass or ceramic stoves)



Step 13 - 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, but if you leave them on, at least loosen them quite a bit, so they don't rust in place due to trapped moisture. 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.



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



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

Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Ketchup - makes 7 - 8 oz jars*

Item	Quantity	Cost in 2013	Source	Subtotal
Tomatoes	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 (8 oz size, wide mouth), includes lids and rings	7 jars	\$8.50/dozen	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box"	\$5.00

			stores; sometimes Big Lots and even hardware stores	
Onions	1 lb	free from the garden, or \$0.50/lb at a PYO	Garden, farm, market	\$0.50
Sugar	1 cups	\$0.50		\$0.50
Vinegar (5%) white	3 cups	\$0.50 (in a large jug)	grocery store	\$0.50
seasoning	See step 7	\$1.00? assuming you already have them. just the fraction you will use.	Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger and Safeway and local "big box" stores	\$1.00
Total				\$4.50 total or about \$1.07 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!