



Here's how to safely preserve tomatoes



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Our tomato vines are heavy with fruit. We have plenty for sandwiches, salsa, and salads. Can you give suggestions to safely preserve them for winter? Jason R., San Luis Obispo

Carol Michael, UCCE Master Food Preserver

There are many methods to preserve tomatoes. There's drying, canning, freezing; relishes, plus sauces: catsup, chili, and pasta. The possibilities are endless.

Drying is the simplest and least expensive method of preservation. Drying removes moisture from the food, destroying microorganisms and preventing their growth. It extends shelf life by slowing down natural enzymes that make food soft, and mushy. Drying concentrates their flavor, adding richness to recipes, and it is a great method to preserve cherry, grape, or Roma tomatoes. There are many delicious ways to cook with them! Add to salads, soups, pastas, pizzas, frittatas, sandwiches, and biscuits. They make a quick snack. If you have a dehydrator, set to 140°F, and follow manufacturers' directions. Or use your oven to dehydrate tomatoes. This oven-dried tomato recipe is delicious and easy.

Oven Dried Tomatoes (adapted from www.thekitchn.com)

Ingredients:

- cherry, grape, or plum tomatoes
- fine sea salt or seasoned salt
- option; Mediterranean herb mix

Instructions: Heat oven to 200°F or lowest setting. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.

1. Slice the tomatoes in half lengthwise. Place them cut-side-up on the baking sheet or a rack to help with the drying process.
2. Lightly sprinkle tomato halves with salt, and dried herb mix, if desired.
3. Bake for 3.5-4.5 hours, or until the tomatoes are dry, watching so they don't burn. You will know the tomatoes are dried sufficiently when they bend but not snap or break. There should be no sticky areas, and no moisture produced when bent.
4. Remove from the oven, cool and store. *

*Place dried tomatoes into an airtight container and allow them to condition for several days at room temperature. Shake or stir daily to allow moisture from less dry pieces move to pieces which are drier. There should be no moisture buildup in the container. Return to the oven or dehydrator for further drying if needed.

Freezer Storage: Spread dried tomatoes in a layer on a parchment-covered baking sheet or plate. Then transfer to the freezer for at least 2 hours. Transfer tomatoes to a freezer-safe bag, squeeze out extra air, or use a freezer safe container. Freeze for up to 3 months.

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