Prep Time: 45 minutes
Cook Time: 30 minutes
Process Time: 15 minutes (for pints, adjust for altitude)
Total Time: Approximately 1 hour 30 minutes

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Ingredients

- 10 cups ripe tomatoes (about 6-7 pounds), peeled, cored, and chopped. Roma tomatoes are ideal as they are meaty and have fewer seeds.

- 2 large yellow onions, finely chopped

- 4-6 jalapeño peppers, seeded and finely chopped (adjust to your desired heat level; leave seeds in for more heat)

- 1 large green bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 large red bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup apple cider vinegar (5% acidity)
- ½ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
- 1 can (6 ounces) tomato paste (for a thicker salsa)
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro, chopped (about 1 cup, loosely packed)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin (optional)

Equipment

- Large, heavy-bottomed pot (non-reactive, such as stainless steel or enameled cast iron)
- Water bath canner with a rack
- 8 pint-sized canning jars, lids, and bands
- Jar lifter, funnel, bubble remover, and lid magnet
- Clean kitchen towels

Instructions

1. Prepare for Canning (Intensity: Low)

Before you begin cooking, it’s crucial to prepare your canning equipment. This ensures a smooth and safe process.

- Sterilize Jars: Wash jars, lids, and bands in hot, soapy water. Keep the jars hot until ready to use. You can do this by placing them in your water bath canner filled with water and bringing it to a simmer, or by running them through a dishwasher cycle and keeping them warm.

- Prepare Canner: Fill your water bath canner with enough water to cover the jars by at least 1-2 inches. Bring the water to a simmer (not a boil) while you prepare the salsa.

- Heat Lids: Place the lids in a small saucepan of hot (not boiling) water to soften the sealing compound.

2. Prepare the Ingredients (Intensity: Medium)

This step requires a fair amount of chopping, so take your time and be careful with your knife.

- Peel Tomatoes: Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Prepare an ice bath in a large bowl. Score the bottom of each tomato with a small “X”. Working in batches, drop the tomatoes into the boiling water for 30-60 seconds, or until the skins begin to split. Immediately transfer them to the ice bath. Once cool enough to handle, the skins will slip right off.

- Chop Vegetables: Core and chop the peeled tomatoes. Finely chop the onions, jalapeños, and bell peppers. Mince the garlic and chop the cilantro.

- Measure Precisely: It is vital to measure your ingredients accurately, especially the tomatoes and acid. Do not add extra vegetables or reduce the amount of vinegar or lime juice, as this can make the salsa unsafe for canning. If your salsa seems too watery, you can drain some of the liquid from the chopped tomatoes before measuring, or add the optional tomato paste.

3. Cook the Salsa (Intensity: Medium-High)

This is where the magic happens and your kitchen will start to smell amazing.

- In your large, non-reactive pot, combine the chopped tomatoes, onions, jalapeños, bell peppers, and garlic.
- Add the apple cider vinegar, lime juice, sugar, salt, black pepper, and cumin (if using). Stir well to combine.
- Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring frequently to prevent scorching.
- Once it reaches a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 20-30 minutes. Stir occasionally. The salsa is ready when it has thickened slightly and the flavors have melded together. If you are using tomato paste, stir it in during the last 10 minutes of cooking.
- Stir in the fresh cilantro just before you are ready to fill the jars.

4. Fill and Process the Jars (Intensity: High)

This final step requires focus and care to ensure a proper seal.

- Fill Jars: Using your funnel, ladle the hot salsa into the hot, sterilized jars, leaving ½ inch of headspace. Use your bubble remover or a thin spatula to remove any air bubbles.
- Clean Rims: Wipe the rims of the jars with a clean, damp cloth to ensure a good seal.

- Seal Jars: Place the heated lids on the jars and screw on the bands until they are fingertip-tight (don’t overtighten).

- Process Jars: Using your jar lifter, carefully lower the filled jars into the simmering water of your canner. Ensure they are fully covered by at least 1-2 inches of water. Bring the water to a full, rolling boil and start your timer.

- Process Time: Process pint jars for 15 minutes. *Note: If you live above 1,000 feet in elevation, you will need to increase the processing time. For 1,001-3,000 ft, add 5 minutes; for 3,001-6,000 ft, add 10 minutes; above 6,000 ft, add 15 minutes.*

- Cool Down: After processing, turn off the heat and carefully remove the jars using the jar lifter. Place them on a clean towel or cooling rack, spaced a few inches apart. Let them cool completely for 12-24 hours without disturbing them.

5. Check Seals and Store (Intensity: Low)

- After 24 hours, check the seals by pressing down on the center of each lid. If it doesn’t flex up and down, the jar is sealed. Remove the bands for storage (you can re-use them) and wipe down the jars.

- Label your jars with the date. Store in a cool, dark place for up to one year. If any jars did not seal, place them in the refrigerator and use within a few weeks.

Recipe Notes and Variations

- Adjusting Heat: The heat level of your salsa is highly customizable. For a mild salsa, remove all seeds and membranes from the jalapeños. For a medium-hot salsa, leave the seeds in half of them. For a hot salsa, use more jalapeños or substitute them with serrano or habanero peppers (but be mindful, as changing the type of pepper can affect the pH).

- Thicker Salsa: Roma tomatoes are the best choice for a thick salsa. If you use juicier tomatoes, you can drain the chopped tomatoes in a colander for 30 minutes before proceeding with the recipe. Adding the optional tomato paste will also help.

- Don’t Change the Ratios: The ratio of tomatoes to acid (vinegar and lime juice) is critical for safe water bath canning. Do not increase the amount of vegetables or decrease the amount of acid.

Nutrition Information

Serving Size: 2 tablespoons (1/16 of a pint jar)
Calories: 10
Total Fat: 0g
Saturated Fat: 0g
Cholesterol: 0mg
Sodium: 65mg
Total Carbohydrates: 2g
Dietary Fiber: 0.5g
Total Sugars: 1g
Protein: 0.3g