

TOMATO PRESERVATION AT HOME

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TOMATOES are now in season and are abundant and cheap. But soon they will be scarce and expensive especially towards December. As housewives what are you doing to preserve the glut for the lean season? Elsewhere smart industrialists are making puree and paste from the surplus of tomatoes, which we buy as tinned tomatoes and use when we could not get fresh tomatoes to buy. But tomato puree or paste has limited use in Ghanaian cookery. Our soups and stews taste better when fresh tomatoes are used so I am sure Ghanaian housewives would like tomatoes preserved as fresh as possible. It is easy to preserve tomatoes at home and have them last till the next season.

Here is how

- First of all you need screw type bottles and the best type of bottle is the Kilner jar. This type of jar can be bought from our department stores, but unfortunately they are very expensive. One small size bottle costs 65 pesewas. In place of these expensive jars, I have found old jam or marmalade bottles just as good for preserving tomatoes. They can be bought from the local markets and from Hausa petty traders at 5 pesewas each.
- In buying the bottles, select those that have no chips or cracks at the edges and make sure that the lids fit properly.
- Wash the jars and lids in warm soapy water and boil for 20-30 minutes to ensure that they are sterile. Leave them in the hot water until you are ready to use them.

Selection of Tomatoes

- Select tomatoes that are fresh, ripe, but firm and are of equal size. Avoid tomatoes that are underripe or are overripe and cracked.
- Having selected the right type of tomatoes,

wash them thoroughly to remove dirt and calyx if any.

- Next, blanch the tomatoes by putting them in a wire basket if you have one, otherwise our local baskets will do as well.
- Dip the basket of tomatoes into boiling water and allow it to remain in the boiling water for just a minute or two. This treatment destroys the enzymes which cause spoilage. You may remove the skin from the tomatoes after draining, but this is not necessary.
- Prepare brine solution by adding 1 tablespoonful of salt to 4 cups of water and boil.
- While the solution is on fire, remove the jars from the hot water.
- Pack enough tomatoes into each jar making sure you don't bruise them.
- Fill the jars with the hot brine to cover the tomatoes leaving only $\frac{1}{2}$ inch space from the top of the jars.
- Screw lids on tightly.
- Line a deep heavy saucepan with a napkin or a piece of calico and fill it with enough water and boil. Lining the pan prevents jars from touching the bottom of the pan and prevents cracking.
- When the water boils put the jars of tomatoes into the pan spacing them and taking care not to have them touch one another nor the sides of the pan. Cover and boil for 30 minutes.
- Remove the jars and stand each on a wooden table or a board to cool.
- Label each jar with the date of bottling.
- The jars of tomatoes should be stored in a cool, dark place to retain the colour.

It is important that bottling is done properly, otherwise the product will not keep long. So, follow the steps carefully and you can save yourself a lot of money when fresh tomatoes are scarce and expensive. **Be a real Home Economist and enjoy using your own product!**