



Fruit Salsas that Sparkle

Tight-lidded canning jars are great for securely sealing juicy fruit salsas like this Citrus Salsa.

Use your grocer's produce section as a rich resource for vibrant, homemade holiday gifts

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Every year around this time, I start racking my brain for a delicious, original concoction to make for holiday gifts. I want something festive yet easy, clever yet practical, and fetching yet not too expensive to make. A tall order, but this year the idea came to me easily: inventive, colorful fruit salsas meet every one of my criteria.

SALSAS ARE EASY TO MAKE AND TO GIVE

These recipes yield about enough to fill two one-pint jars, and they're easily doubled, depending on the length of your gift list. No fancy equipment or extensive kitchen time is needed. Salsas can be



Crosshatching makes a neat dice. To dice a mango, slice off the flesh from both sides of the pit, score in a crisscross pattern, and cut away the tiny cubes of mango.

made in less than an hour and are ready to give at a second's notice. And best of all, they're delicious.

Salsa experiments rarely go wrong. Trying all sorts of ingredient combinations is good fun. You'll stay on the right track if you keep in mind the foods your friends like to prepare, and then match flavor combinations accordingly.

A salsa should always complement a main dish. I think of salsa as the best supporting performer in a play: never upstaging the leading players. Tropical fruits and roasted red peppers team well with poultry or firm-fleshed fish. Citrus fruits make a beautiful sweet-tart salsa that's right with any fish, hot or cold. Cranberry salsa is a refreshing take on the traditional

accompaniment to a roasted bird. The salsa's flavors are strong, yet when teamed with a turkey dinner or sandwich, they blend gracefully and don't overwhelm.

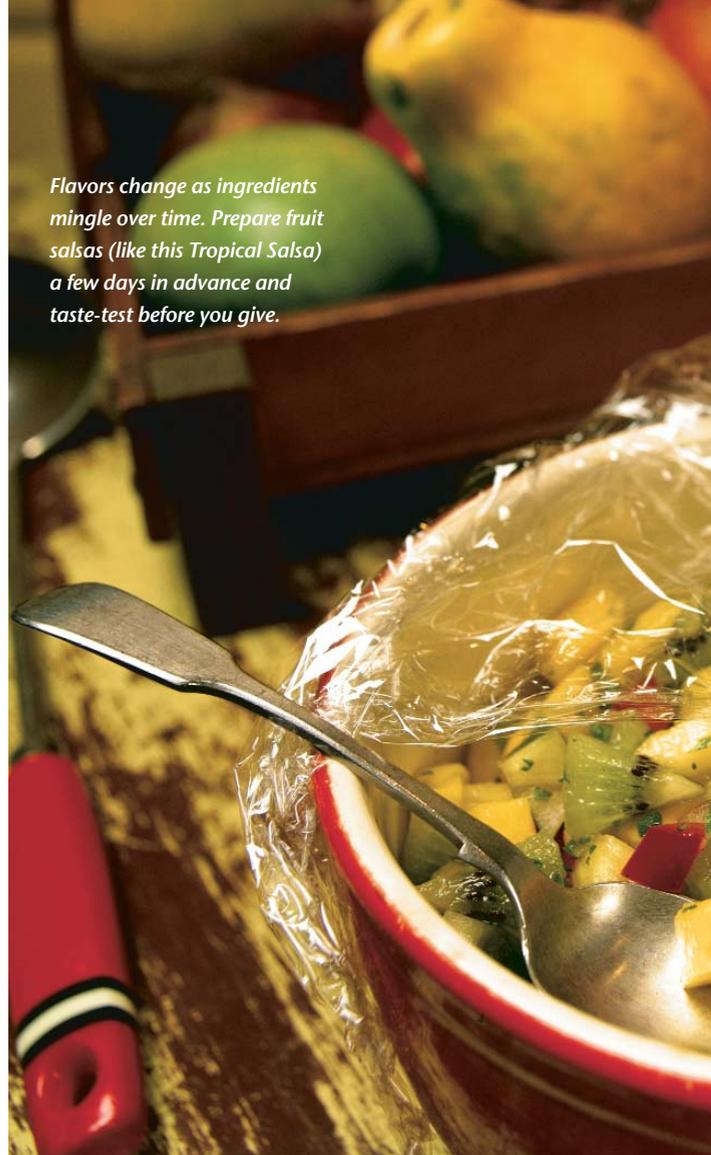
CHOOSE WELL-RIPENED PRODUCE

Once I develop a combination, I search for the best produce I can find. The fruit doesn't have to be the rarest or most expensive, just well ripened. Trust your senses and you'll make good choices. Fully ripened papaya should be golden yellow, firm, and supple when pressed. Sweet pineapple will be fragrant and tinged with yellow and orange; stay away from green ones. Citrus should feel heavy for its size.

DEVELOP FLAVORS BY MAKING SALSA AHEAD

These salsa recipes are very forgiving—a little extra jalapeño or more papaya and less mango, for example, will be just fine. Tailor the ingredient proportions to suit your taste buds, and always taste-test before you transfer the salsas to gift jars, because their flavors develop and change over time. Preparing a salsa a couple of days in advance will give you better insight into its true character and will allow time for seasoning adjustments.

Don't bother actually canning these salsas—the heat would dull their flavors.



Flavors change as ingredients mingle over time. Prepare fruit salsas (like this Tropical Salsa) a few days in advance and taste-test before you give.

Choose containers with economy in mind: a little salsa goes a long way, and giving in small, one-cup quantities means more jars per batch. The vessels you pick for these juicy salsas must have tight-fitting lids. Dress up plain jars with pretty ribbons and attractive tags. Never prepare or store fruit salsas in aluminum.

I'd advise against canning these salsas: canning would cause the fresh flavors to dull when exposed to heat. Instead, run the jars and lids through the dishwasher before you fill them and then stash the salsas in the fridge. They'll keep for two to three weeks.

Citrus Salsa

If the citrus sections and radishes seem unwieldy, you can chop them for a more traditional salsa look. This one is great served with fish. *Yields 3½ cups.*

- 2 blood oranges
- 2 navel oranges
- 1 pink grapefruit
- 1 lime
- ¾ cup thinly sliced radishes
- 1 fresh red chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 2 to 3 Tbs. minced mint leaves
- Pinch salt
- Pinch cayenne

Remove the zest and pith from the oranges, grapefruit, and lime. With a sharp knife, carefully cut the citrus



sections from the membranes over a bowl, letting the bowl catch the juices. Coarsely chop each section, add the remaining ingredients, and gently toss together. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Tropical Salsa

This is one of my favorite toppers for grilled chicken or fish. *Yields 4½ cups.*

*1 cup diced mango (1 large mango)
1 cup diced papaya (1 large papaya)
½ cup diced kiwi (2 small kiwis)
1 cup diced pineapple
½ cup diced red bell pepper
¼ cup diced red onion
¼ cup packed cilantro leaves, minced
1 or 2 jalapeños, stemmed, seeded, and minced
1 Tbs. lime juice
Pinch salt
Pinch cayenne*

Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and toss gently. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Cranberry-Pear Salsa

Delicious with tortilla chips, this salsa is even better on turkey sandwiches. *Yields 4½ cups.*

*12 oz. fresh cranberries
1½ cups coarsely chopped pears (about 2 medium pears)
½ cup diced green bell pepper*



"These salsas are so pretty that I don't even wrap them when I give them as gifts," says author Abby Dodge.

*¼ cup honey
½ cup sugar
1 serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
1 tsp. minced orange zest
2 Tbs. fresh orange juice
1 Tbs. canola oil
Pinch salt*

Chop the cranberries, or pulse them in a food processor until coarse. Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and toss gently. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a recipe consultant, a food stylist, and Fine Cooking's recipe tester. Her book on fruit desserts will be published this spring by Rizzoli International. ♦

Cranberry-Pear Salsa is a new take on an old favorite, and you can serve it just the same way.

