



Preserve Today, Relish Tomorrow

UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

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September is pepper season in my garden and sometimes I stand there wondering what I can do with them all. I have also noticed that red bell peppers have been a good bargain in one of our local supermarkets all summer. Preserving sale items from the grocery store is a great way to capitalize on a bargain.

Although there are many ways to preserve peppers, this recipe for Roasted Red Bell Pepper Spread is a staple in my house. It is so nice to have a quick and handy spread for an appetizer or something more interesting than the usual condiments for a sandwich.

I like to serve it over a mild chevre (goat cheese) or even some cream cheese (you attended our Basic Cheese Making class, right? Now you can make your own homemade cream cheese!). I often freshen it with fresh garlic and sweet basil before serving. Consider toasting some walnuts and adding them to your dip. Sometimes I also add some re-hydrated, julienned, sun-dried tomatoes into the mix, too. Greek Yogurt is also an option, but do not use non-fat as it does not have the richness needed for a good dip. Another idea is to add it to some hummus for a nice change of pace. Making a pasta sauce is yet another idea. I am sure you will find many uses for this versatile condiment.



Photo courtesy of freshpreserving.com

Roasted Red Pepper Spread Makes about 5 (8 oz) half pints

The roasted vegetables in this spread have a wonderful robust flavor that can be enjoyed on toasted crusty breads. We recommend using it instead of tomatoes to make your favorite bruschetta.

You will need:

- 6 lb red bell peppers (about 14 medium)
- 1 lb Italian plum tomatoes (about 5 medium)
- 2 cloves garlic, unpeeled
- 1 small white onion
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 2 Tbsp finely chopped fresh basil
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 5 (8 oz) half pint glass preserving jars with lids and bands

1.) ROAST red peppers, tomatoes, garlic and onion under a broiler or on a grill at 425°F, turning to roast all sides, until tomatoes and peppers are blistered, blackened and softened and garlic and onion are blackened in spots. Remove from heat.

2.) PLACE pepper and tomatoes in paper bags, secure opening and let cool about 15 minutes. Allow garlic and onion to cool. Peel garlic and onion. Finely chop garlic. Set aside. Finely chop onion, measuring 1/4 cup. Set aside. Peel and seed peppers and tomatoes. Place peppers and tomatoes in a food processor or blender, working in batches, and process until smooth.

3.) PREPARE boiling water canner. Heat jars and lids in simmering water until ready for use. Do not boil. Set bands aside.

4.) COMBINE pepper and tomato puree, garlic, onion, vinegar, basil, sugar and salt in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until mixture thickens and mounds on a spoon, about 20 minutes.

5.) LADLE hot spread into hot jars leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Wipe rim. Center hot lid on jar. Apply band and adjust until fit is fingertip tight.

6.) PROCESS in a boiling water canner for 10 minutes, adjusting for altitude. Remove jars and cool. Check lids for seal after 24 hours. Lid should not flex up and down when center is pressed.

Source: Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving

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Tip: Be sure to peel the peppers and leave just a little of the black "char". This "char" can cause the product to become bitter over time. A little goes a long way!

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