

Can I can my own salsa recipe?

Salsas are usually mixtures of acid and low-acid ingredients; they are an example of an acidified food. The specific recipe, and sometimes preparation method, will determine if a salsa can be processed in a boiling water canner or a pressure canner. A process must be scientifically determined for each recipe. The National Center for Food Preservation at the University of Georgia Extension has science-based recipes and information on canning, freezing and preserving many types of foods.

Is it safe to process food in the oven?

No. This can be dangerous because the temperature will vary according to the accuracy of oven regulators and circulation of heat. Dry heat is very slow in penetrating into jars of food. Also, jars explode easily in the oven.

Can food be re-canned if the lid does not seal?

Canned food can safely be re-canned if the unsealed jar is discovered within 24 hours. To re-can, remove the lid and check the jar-sealing surface for tiny nicks. Change the jar; if necessary, add a new treated lid and reprocess using the same processing time.

Visit our website at cals.arizona.edu/maricopa/fcs/foodpres.htm for recipes and information on preserving foods and a link to the National Extension Food Preservation website which includes freezing, canning recipes for vegetables, meats and mixtures foods like salsa and soups. You can also call your local Cooperative Extension office or the UA Cooperative Extension in Maricopa County at 602-470-8086 ext 341 to have questions answered.

Sources:

So Easy to Preserve and *USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning*, National Center for Food Preservation, University of Georgia www.uga.edu/nchfp/

Lisa Benton



The Creosote Bush Smells Like Rain— Where There is None

Steve Woods, Graduate Student; Steve Archer, Ph.D., Professor; and Larry Howery, Ph.D., Range Management Extension Specialist; all with the School of Natural Resources, University of Arizona

Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) is an amazing plant. It can live for thousands of years. As the central stems die or are broken off, new stems sprout around the edge, eventually forming a circle of clones. The leaves contain chemicals making it unpalatable to most animals. Some say 'the creosote bush smells of rain' – or does the rain smell of creosote bush? Perhaps it depends on how long you've been in the desert. Either way, you are unlikely to see a creosote bush experiencing significant browsing by animals. Some insects can tolerate its chemical defenses, but livestock and other mammals find it highly distasteful and shun it. Try rubbing and smelling the leaves and you'll see why.

Creosote bush can grow in the driest hot US deserts, where no other shrubs can survive. It can extract moisture from parched soil through its extensive root system. The leaves can withstand high temperatures and dehydration. It needs plenty of soil air for root growth and is rarely found in areas of poor drainage or moderate rainfall. Temperatures a few degrees below freezing can break the water columns that draw nutrients up from roots to the leaves. This break causes 'cavitation' of the 'xylem vessels' – a damaging event which can kill plants. This helps explain its absence from the cold deserts of Utah and Nevada.

If you drive along I -10 across Arizona and into New Mexico, take a look at the creosote bushes near the road. See how the soil around their stems can be several inches higher than the soil further away. This is 'pedestalling' – the base of the plant has become perched above the rest of the ground. It's a sign of soil erosion, caused by wind or water. Many creosote bush areas have little grass and herb cover, so little protection from erosion exists except close to the creosote bushes, where some dust may be caught. Did the creosote bush reduce the grass cover, or did loss of grass let the creosote bush in? Perhaps both. But the effect remains – significant soil loss.

Remember when you smelled the leaves? Imagine drinking creosote bush tea. Yes, it has been done, as herbal remedies ranging from treating kidney stones to use as an emetic. However, its pharmacology is not well understood and some studies suggest it can cause liver and kidney damage.

So whether you see the creosote bush as just another desert plant or find its aroma intriguing in the rain, we can all respect its tenacity, its ability to thrive where few of its peers can. Many of these bushes may outlive our grandchildren and survive droughts that occur only once in a thousand years.