

# Chicks & Salsa

Grow a salsa garden and make salsa for a delicious learning experience

## Gardening Connection:

Plant a salsa garden. It can include tomatoes, jalapenos, onions, garlic and cilantro.

## Time

### Required:

2- 45 minute sessions + garden growth time

## Grade Level:

Upper Elementary

## EDUCATOR NOTE:

Be aware of any food allergies and kitchen safety when preparing and tasting food in the classroom. See resources section for tips on cooking in the classroom.

Planting and preparation for this activity should begin in spring so that salsa vegetables can be harvested in late summer or early fall. See resources section for information about growing seasons.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Identify the ingredients used to make salsa.
2. Understand the history and culinary uses for several salsa ingredients.
3. Grow ingredients for and make salsa.

## BACKGROUND

Nearly 35 million people in the United States grow tomato plants each summer. It is the most popular garden crop.

Many gardeners use their tomatoes to make salsa. There are many ways to make salsa, but tomatoes are almost always a key ingredient.

The origins of salsa (combination of chilies, tomatoes and other spices) can be traced to the Ancient Aztecs, Mayans and Incas.

"Salsa is the Spanish word for sauce--an indication of this condiment's origin in Spanish-speaking countries of the Western Hemisphere, particularly Mexico and the countries of Central America. In these countries, the word "salsa" encompasses a wide range of culinary concoctions, from sauces that are smooth, cooked, and served warm or hot, to condiments that are chunky, raw, and served at room temperature.

In the United States, the consumption of condiment salsas began to expand beyond the local Hispanic communities during the 1940s, initially in those parts of the American Southwest where Mexican food was traditionally eaten. The most common type of salsa was--and still is--a version of Mexican salsa cruda (raw sauce), also known as salsa fresca (fresh sauce) or salsa Mexicana (Mexican sauce), made with chopped tomatoes, onions, and fresh green jalapeno or serrano peppers.

Salsa's popularity nationwide is generally attributed to Americans' increasing consumption of hot-and-spicy foods during the second half of the twentieth century. Salsas are also perceived as healthy foods, because many of them are low in calories, high in fiber, and full of vitamins." ---*Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, Andrew F. Smith editor [Oxford University Press:New York] 2004, Volume 2 (p. 389.)

## Subjects

Language Arts  
Math  
History  
Social Studies  
Science  
Art

## Vocabulary

Ole  
Ooh La La  
Fiesta

## Project Connections

PLT- Pass the Plants Please

## **MATERIALS**

- Tomato plants
- Jalapeno plants
- Onion bulbs
- Garlic bulbs
- Cilantro seeds
- “Chicks and Salsa” by Aaron Reynolds
- Ingredients to make a batch of salsa
- Several kinds of prepared salsa in jars
- Chips

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Engage**

Ask students: Do you like tomatoes? Ketchup? Pizza? Chili? Salsa?  
If you like any of these foods, you probably like tomatoes.

Read “Chicks and Salsa” by Aaron Reynolds aloud to the class.

- What kinds of foods did the chickens create?
- What culture is known for these foods?
- How do you know?
- What ingredients did the chickens need for salsa?

Point out the alliteration in the story. Look for repetition and patterns.

### **Explore**

Work with you students to plan and plant a salsa garden!

- Work with the students to prepare your planting site whether it is a garden plot or container garden.
- Have students draw out their ideas for planting and organization of the garden.
- Typically, a salsa garden will include tomatoes or tomatillos, onion, garlic, peppers & chilies, and herbs (such as cilantro or oregano). Ask students what ingredients they like to have in salsa.
- Onions are typically planted in early spring; tomatoes, peppers, and herbs are planted in late spring; and garlic is planted in the fall. Depending on the season and space available, you may only grow a few of the ingredients for salsa.

See the Kansas School Gardens Online Curriculum <http://www.kansasgreenschools.org/welcome-kansas-school-gardens-curriculum> for more information about planning and planting a school garden.

Visit [www.salsagarden.com](http://www.salsagarden.com) for tips on planting a salsa themed garden.

## Explain

Engage your students in a discussion about the history of salsa:

### History of Salsa:

Although the term "salsa" was coined by the Spanish, this condiment has been around since long before the Spanish were exposed to it. Possibly as far back as 3000 BC, the Aztecs combined chilies with tomatoes or tomatillos to produce this condiment.

Wild tomatoes are native to Peru and Ecuador. Tomatillos, which are not green tomatoes, are native to the Andes, in the area which is now Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. Domestication of these plants allowed for salsa to become a staple of the Aztec diet. Chiles, ground squash seeds and other ingredients, even beans, were combined with the tomatoes or tomatillos.

The Spanish were first exposed to tomatoes and this dish after they conquered the Aztecs (1519-1521). It was served with venison, wild turkey, lobster and fish. Some say it was the conquistadores who first called it salsa. Others say it was a Spanish priest and missionary named [Alonso de Molina](#) who named it in 1571.

*History of salsa taken from <http://www.thenibble.com/reviews/main/salsas/history-of-salsa2.asp>*

*Please see resources section for more information about the history of salsa.*

Have the students investigate the history and culinary uses of tomatoes, chilies, onions and garlic. Students will also find that onions and garlic were often used for medicinal purposes. Sort students into groups to write a report on each of the ingredients in salsa: tomatoes, chilies, onions and garlic.

## Elaborate

Ask students what are their favorite types of salsa? Provide chips and several different bottled salsas for students to taste. Ask them to compare and contrast the ingredients in each salsa they tasted.

Use the recipe below or follow the recipe in the back of the book, *Chicks and Salsa*, for making salsa. Use produce from your school garden if available, or purchase fresh ingredients from a farmer's market or grocery store.

- Have the students help with the salsa preparation.
- Discuss how to measure out the ingredients and follow a recipe.
- Determine how many people will be eating the salsa. How much of everything will you need to have enough salsa?

### **Garden Salsa**

5 medium Tomatoes, diced  
3 cloves Garlic, minced  
½ cup Onion, diced  
¼ cup fresh Lime Juice  
2 roasted Jalapenos seeded and minced  
¼ cup chopped fresh Cilantro  
¼ tsp. Salt

Combine all ingredients in bowl and stir to mix.  
Lightly mash with a fork and stir again. Cover bowl  
and place in refrigerator to chill for at least one hour.

Recipe from [www.salsagarden.com](http://www.salsagarden.com)

- Prepare the salsa.
- Have a taste test.
- Have students compare their fresh salsa to bottled salsa they tasted. Which one do they like best?

### **Evaluate**

Have students develop a “how to” guide for growing and making salsa. This may be in the form of a book, a power point presentation, or a short video documentary on their salsa garden.

### **Extension Ideas**

- Look up different salsa recipes online. Break students into groups to make the different recipes. Try each salsa and vote on the class favorite.
- Make some of the other foods discussed in the book: guacamole, beans & chiles, tamales. Invite a guest speaker to discuss cultural heritage. Plan a fiesta!
- Have student create their own salsa recipes. Compile the salsa recipes into a book about salsa.
- Study one of the countries that salsa originated in. Look at other ethnic foods.
- Discuss other food gardens that could be created, such as a pizza garden, a vegetable soup garden or a pickle garden.
- Salsa and the scientific method  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/epl1/Levri%20and%20Levri%20salsa.pdf>

### **Related Readings:**

*Cooking with Herb* by Jules Bass

*I Will Never NOT Ever Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child

*Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert

*Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert

*Fiesta Fiasco* by Ann Whitford Paul

*Cinco de Mouse-O!* by Judy Cox

### **Resources:**

An internet site that looks at the history of food in a fun way

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/food/>

This site includes several salsa garden designs as well as tips for what varieties to choose that might be incorporated into the section about planting a salsa garden

<http://www.veggiegardener.com/salsa-vegetable-garden/>

Information about the history of salsa from

<http://www.thenibble.com/reviews/main/salsas/history-of-salsa2.asp>

Tips for creating a salsa garden:

[www.salsagarden.com](http://www.salsagarden.com)

Information about growing seasons and weather considerations for garden vegetables

<http://www.kansasgreenschools.org/growing-seasons-weather>

Tips for cooking in the classroom

<http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CookingClassroom.pdf>

[www.californiahealthykids.org/Pages/articles/cooking.ppt](http://www.californiahealthykids.org/Pages/articles/cooking.ppt)