

Fire-Charred Tomato Chipotle Salsa

Yield: Makes 1 to 1-1/2 cups

2 large ripe red tomatoes
1 small white onion, peeled and quartered
3 cloves garlic, peeled and skewered on a wooden tooth pick
1 to 2 chipotle peppers (see Note)
3 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice, or more to taste
Coarse salt (kosher or sea) and freshly ground black pepper

You'll also need:

1 cup wood chips or chunks (preferably mesquite), unsoaked

1. Set up the grill for direct grilling and preheat to high. If using a gas grill, place all of the wood chips or chunks in the smoker box or in a smoker pouch and run the grill on high until you see smoke. If using a charcoal grill, preheat it to high, then toss all of the wood chips or chunks on the coals.

2. When ready to cook, place the tomatoes, onion, and garlic on the hot grate. Grill the tomatoes and onion until the skins are dark and blistered; grill the garlic until lightly browned. This will take 2 to 3 minutes per side (8 to 12 minutes in all) for the tomatoes and onion and 2 to 3 minutes per side (4 to 6 minutes in all) for the garlic. Transfer the grilled tomatoes, onion, and garlic to a plate and let cool. Remove the toothpick from the garlic. The grilled vegetables can be refrigerated, covered, for up to 2 days.

3. Mince the chipotle(s). Scrape any really burnt bits of the tomatoes. Combine the minced chipotles, cilantro, and lime juice with the grilled tomatoes, onion, and garlic in a food processor and process to a coarse puree. Taste for seasoning, adding salt and pepper to taste and more lime juice as necessary; the salsa should be highly seasoned. The salsa is best served within 3 to 4 hours of being made.

Note: Chipotle peppers (smoked jalapeños) are available both canned and dried. I prefer the canned ones, which come in a flavorful sauce called adobo. If your chipotles are dried, soak them in warm water for 30 minutes before using, then drain them and tear them into 1-inch pieces. For a milder salsa, discard the ribs and seeds.