Canning tomatoes is an opportunity to relive the past. All the equipment – jars, canner, tongs, and bowls – are just like moms. Heirloom tomatoes, scalded, peeled, and boiled, get packed in hot jars. As I remember, a wonderful aroma fills up the kitchen. Rows of red maters, promising winter dinners, sit on cellar shelves.

We start by picking. I like to use the paste ones, which cooks down faster. But everything ripe needs to go to the kitchen, and our patch is big. They get washed a bit, dipped into boiling water, and then into cold. Cored, skinned, and quartered, a big pot is soon filled up and set on the flame.

As they boil on down, peppers and onions are diced and thrown in the mix. A trip to the barn provides us with lots of jars needing a washing. Water is heated in the blue speckled canner neighbors have lent us. I thought I had one, but after looking around, realized I don't. I could not make it if it weren't for my neighbors, helpful and friendly.

Unfortunately, my water heater is out and my stove is small. By taking our time and playing musical pots, the water gets hot. Both pints and quart jars and their lids and their rings are washed and then rinsed.

Back in the garden, we pick lots more tomatoes and sort out ripe ones. We might as well can every tomato we can while we're into it. Washing and scalding, peeling and boiling them down continues all day.

When the sauce thickens several sprigs of fresh basil are put in the pot. I pull hem back out before I can up the sauce but their flavor stays. Then boiling water is poured into seven quarts and then poured back out. The lids are also immersed into hot water so everything's hot.

A teaspoon of salt is put into every jar and then we're ready. The hot boiling sauce is poured into all the jars and the tops wiped clean. I screw the lids down and place them in the canner and turn up the flames. Once it starts boiling, they boil twenty-five minutes and then they are done.

Meanwhile the next batch is poured into more hot jars and ready to go. Into the evening we continue the process until friends arrive. Soon guitars and bass are filling the living room with

our homemade songs.

Early next morning I'm back peeling tomatoes and boiling water. Another full day and then another full night and then we are through. As the jars cool off they make satisfying pings that tell us they're sealed.

The kitchen counter is full of sixty-five jars of tomato sauce. For Mexican food we'll add beans and hot peppers for a spicy meal. For our spaghetti we will add lots of garlic and oregano.

Indulging myself in Japanese poetry is interesting. With head in the clouds and my hands in tomatoes, rhythm emerges. Each year in August the tomatoes need canning, just like the old days.

As the saying goes, two things money can't buy are love and homegrown maters.