

Grow Your Own SWEET CORN

N.S. MANSOUR AND C. RAAB

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Sweet corn is a warm-season vegetable that can be grown easily in most gardens. Successful plantings will yield continuous harvests. Like most vegetables, corn will grow best with plenty of sunlight. More than any other vegetable, the good taste of corn depends on harvesting the ears at the right time and cooking them quickly. Taste is the best reason for homegrown sweet corn.

In addition to its fine flavor, 1 pound of sweet corn will yield 55 grams of

carbohydrates, 9 grams of protein, 2 grams of fat, and 240 calories of food energy. Kernel texture, shape, and flavor are governed by starch and sugar content, and this differs with each variety.

These variations make our sweet corn soft-shelled, moist, and sweet. Besides its popular use as corn-on-the-cob, sweet corn can be used in scalloped dishes, succotash, relishes, fritters, soups, and chowders. Many,

but not all, sweet corn varieties are quite acceptable for freezing.

Trying to decide what sweet corn variety to plant by searching a seed catalog or looking over a seed rack can be very confusing. Many excellent varieties are available to home gardeners, and several new ones are developed and introduced each year.

Some factors to consider when you choose varieties are the kernel color, the maturity date, and disease resistance. Selecting a yellow- or white-kernelled corn is a matter of personal preference. Another choice is to plant a variety that produces bicolor ears, with both yellow and white kernels. Yellow corn has the nutritional advantage of being a fairly good source of vitamin A. White corn contains virtually no vitamin A.

Sweet corn may be divided into four distinct types: standard, supersweet, sugary enhanced, and synergistic. Standard varieties contain a "sugary gene" responsible for the kernels' sweetness and creamy texture.

Supersweet varieties contain a special gene that makes the kernels sweeter than those of standard varieties. Supersweet and sugary enhanced



N.S. (Bill) Mansour, Extension vegetable crops specialist, and Carolyn A. Raab, Extension food and nutrition specialist, Oregon State University. Adapted for use in Oregon from a University of Idaho Cooperative Extension publication. It replaces EC 878.

varieties convert the sugar to starch more slowly, preserving the sweetness for a longer time.

Kernels of the supersweet varieties have a crispy texture and contain low amounts of the water-soluble polysaccharides (complex sugars) that impart the creamy texture to other sweet corn varieties.

Synergistic varieties are not numerous. Their cobs have ¼ supersweet kernels and ¾ standard kernels. Seeds of this type have the improved emergence characteristics of standard sweet corn.

Varieties

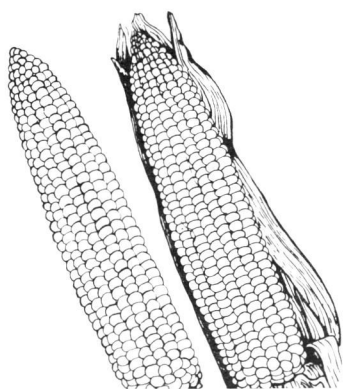
The maturity dates listed in seed catalogs are relative—the actual number of days to harvest varies from year to year, and location to location, depending on the actual degree days or heat units your area receives.

The varieties listed in table 1 are recommended for Oregon. Use early varieties in western Oregon.

Planting dates

Sweet corn requires warm soil for germination (above 55°F for standard varieties and about 65°F for supersweet varieties). Early plantings of standard sweet corn should be made at the mean frost-free date unless you use special soil-warming protection such as a polyethylene mulch film.

The warmer the temperature, the faster the corn grows to maturity. The corn variety you plant should have an early maturity date, and it should have been developed for weather conditions in your area.



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Mansour, N. S.
Grow your own sweet corn

For a continuous supply of sweet corn throughout the summer, plant an early variety, a second early variety, and a main crop variety in the first planting. For example, you may wish to select Sundance (70 days to harvest) for the first early variety, Miracle (85 days to harvest) for the second early variety, and Jubilee (90 days to harvest) for the main crop variety.

Make a second planting and successive plantings of your favorite main crop or late variety when three to four

leaves have appeared on the seedlings in the previous planting. Plantings can be made as late as the first week of July in warmer areas of Oregon.

Seedbed

Soil texture can vary greatly for sweet corn production. A sandy loam is best all-around, but corn can be grown in clayey or loam soils also. Cultivate the soil when soil moisture will allow formation of a mud ball and will allow the ball to crumble into pieces under finger pressure.

Cultivation should mix crop residues and organic matter in the top 7 to 8 inches of soil, destroy current weed growth, and provide a granular-type bed for seeding. Overcultivated soil becomes powdery and has a tendency to crust. The ideal pH for corn growth is from 6.0 to 8.0.

Use the following planting specifications:

- Seeds per foot—4 to 6 (thin to 1 plant every 6 to 9 inches after emergence)
- Row width—30 to 36 inches
- Seed depth—1½ to 2½ inches

Planting suggestions

Since sweet corn is wind-pollinated, the plants should be in three or more short rows in place of one long row. After pollination, kernel growth may be hampered by temperature, moisture, and soil conditions. This is why some ears may be completely filled while others may not.

As much as possible, isolate supersweet varieties from all other types. Cross-pollination can take place between supersweet and standard or sugary enhanced (se). If this occurs, it will severely affect the quality of both types.

One way to isolate corn is to choose varieties with differing lengths of growing season (at least 10 days difference) and plant them at the same time. This will separate the time of pollination and reduce the chances of cross-pollination. Another control method is to allow 10 or more days between planting the different types—while providing as much distance as possible—then your varieties should not cross.

Table 1.—Corn for the home garden

Category, type, variety	Season
<i>Sweet corn</i>	
Standard (su ₁)	
Sundance	early
Spring Gold	early
Early Sunglow	early
Harmony (bicolor)	early
Earlivee	early
Butter and Sugar	early
Jubilee	main
Silver Queen (white)	late
Supersweet (sh ₂)	
How Sweet It Is (white)	main
Summersweet 7200	main
Burpee's Sugar Sweet	main
Illinigold	main
Florida Staysweet	main
Sweetie	main
Phenomenal (bicolor)	main
Pinnacle	main
Sugary enhanced (se)	
Sugar Buns	early
Miracle	main
Platinum Lady (white)	main
White Lightning (white)	main
Snowbelle (white)	main
Double Delight (bicolor)	main
Kandy Korn	late
Synergistic	
Honeycomb	main
Sugar Loaf	main
<i>Popcorn</i>	
Peppy (white)	early
Iopop 12 (yellow)	main
White Cloud	main
<i>Ornamental</i>	
Fiesta	main
Papoose (miniature)	main
Pretty Pops (popcorn)	main
Carousel (miniature)	main
Strawberry (miniature popcorn)	main
Indian Ornamental	late

Popcorn and field corn have genes that are dominant over sweet corn. If a cross takes place, the sweet corn will be tough and starchy.

After the plants are up, thin them 6 to 9 inches apart. Too many seedlings have the same effect as too many weeds. If you leave them too close, your corn will have small, poorly filled ears. Good spacing is necessary to ensure adequate sunlight.

Fertilizer

Since corn has a high nitrogen requirement, the first application of nitrogen and other nutrients should be broadcast before planting. As a general rule, use 2 to 3 pounds of fertilizer such as 10-10-10 for each 100 square feet of garden area. Spread the fertilizer evenly over the soil. Work it into the soil 3 to 4 inches deep.

If additional nitrogen is needed, you can sidedress it around the plants before tasseling. Plants stunted by nutrient deficiency seldom recover and produce up to their potential.

Cultivation and watering

Cultivation should be shallow when necessary to remove other plant competition. Deep cultivation will destroy much of the root system and reduce yield and quality. The number of suckers a sweet corn plant produces depends on the variety. You do not have to remove suckers; their removal does not increase yield—it may reduce it.

Corn requires a high supply of moisture throughout the growing season. The soils should be filled to capacity and then allowed to dry to 60% of water-holding capacity before rewatering. (At 60% moisture, a mud ball at the 5-inch soil depth will crumble under finger pressure into

medium-sized fragments; it will feel damp. Fingerprints will be left on the ball.)

An adequate supply of soil moisture is especially critical at silking time and at kernel-forming time. However, avoid waterlogged, poorly drained soils because root decay and resulting poor plant growth may occur.

Insects and diseases

These insects may be a problem in sweet corn: corn earworms, cutworms, armyworms, wireworms, rootworms, slugs, aphids, spider mites, earwigs, and cucumber beetles.

Diseases are seldom a problem in home gardens. Diseases that may be problems in larger plantings are root, stalk, and ear rot, seed rot, seedling blight, and smut. For more information, see Fact Sheet 242, *Discourage Plant Diseases in Your Home Garden* (single copy no charge; order from Agricultural Communications, Publications Orders, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331-2119).

Harvesting

Generally, depending on temperatures, sweet corn will be ripe 22 to 24 days after silking. Kernel development is faster during hot weather if soil moisture is adequate. However, if the air temperature is cool or the soil is dry, maturity will be delayed.

When mature enough to eat, the silks are brown. The end of the ear is blunt, not pointed, which indicates kernels at the top are completely filled out. The liquid squeezed from a kernel will be milky (immature, watery; overmature, solid or creamy).

The prime quality of a corn ear will last about 4 to 5 days before the sugar starts to turn to starch. Pick when the sugar is at its maximum. Canning corn

can be picked when it is in the cream stage.

Sweet corn loses quality quickly after picking, especially at high temperatures. Process as quickly as possible after harvesting. Pull cob from stalk with a downward motion and twist to the side.

Afterharvest handling

Cool your crop as quickly as possible after harvest—sugar loss from harvested sweet corn is rapid at high temperatures. If you must keep a fresh corn product for any length of time after harvest, place it in a moist environment and a temperature as close to 32°F as possible. Supersweet varieties store much better than standard varieties.

To get the best taste, cook and eat sweet corn the day you pick it.

Preserving corn

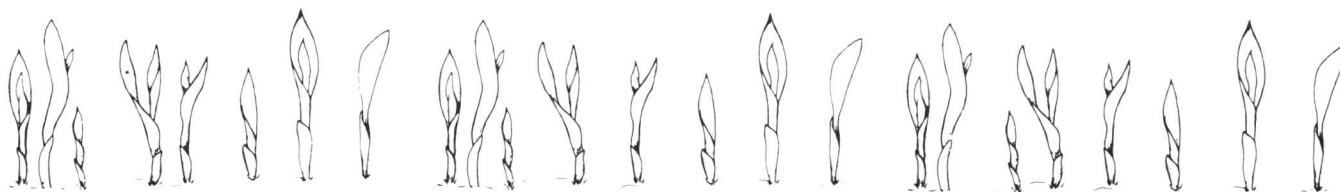
Corn may be frozen, canned, or dried. For all methods, husk ears and remove silk. Wash.

Freezing whole kernel corn. Blanch in boiling water for 4 to 5 minutes. Allow 1 gallon of water for each pound of corn. Cool promptly in ice water. Drain. Cut the outer third of the kernels from the cob. Pack into moisture- and vapor-resistant freezing containers, leaving ½ inch head space. Seal and freeze at 0°F or below for best quality.

Canning whole kernel corn. Cut the outer third of kernels from the cob. Use either the raw- or hot-pack method.

Raw pack. Pack corn loosely into jars, leaving 1 inch head space. Add salt, if desired (½ teaspoon per pint, 1 teaspoon per quart). Fill jars with boiling water, leaving 1 inch head space.

Corn seedlings



Hot pack. Heat kernels to boiling (use 1 pint of water per quart of corn). Pack corn and liquid into jars, leaving 1 inch head space. Add salt, if desired.

After packing, wipe rims of jars, adjust lids, and process in a pressure canner, following manufacturer's directions for venting and operation.

Process pints of raw- or hot-packed corn for 55 minutes at 10 pounds pressure; quarts, for 85 minutes.

Canning cream-style corn. Cut the kernels halfway to the cob, then scrape the cob. Heat kernels to boiling, using 1 pint water per quart of corn. Pack in pint jars, leaving 1 inch head space. (Larger jars can't be used because heat penetrates this thick food very slowly.) Add salt, if desired. Wipe rims, adjust lids, and process pints for 85 minutes at 10 pounds pressure.

For an added margin of safety, boil all home-canned corn for at least 10 minutes before tasting.

Drying. Blanch ears for 4 minutes, allowing 1 gallon of water for each pound of corn. Cool promptly in ice water. Drain and cut kernels off the cob. Spread in thin layer on drying trays. Dry to brittle stage in the sun, or in an oven or dehydrator at 140°F. For further information, contact your county Extension office.



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