

HOME & GARDEN

Corny American gardens

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The quintessential American crop is corn. As a gift from the Indians it figures prominently in the stories of our first Thanksgiving. Now the American summer could not exist without picnics and barbecues featuring steaming golden ears of buttered corn. North or South, there are regional specialties using corn: corn bread, mush, spoon bread, hush puppies or grits. Corn — boiled, roasted, creamed, chowdered or popped — it's a treat for everyone.

BETWEEN THE ROWS

Corn isn't difficult to grow but there are a couple of things to remember. First, corn is a heavy feeder so it should not be grown in the same place two years in a row, and the soil should be well fertilized before planting. Spread lime, as well as rock phosphate, the fall before. In the spring, till in rotted manure before planting. Any amount will help, and you don't have to worry about spreading too much. I know someone who planted a corn patch in a barnyard that his animals had manured for a number of years and the corn was magnificent. You just can't overdo it.

Don't plant corn too early in the season. It is a warm weather crop and the way to insure having corn to eat over a period of time is to plant early, mid-season and late varieties. Don't try to plant early and have staggered plantings.

Also it's important to remember that corn must be cross-pollinated so it should be planted in concentrated blocks and not in isolated rows.

The seed should be planted about 6 inches apart in rows that are about 2 feet apart. Cultivation is important while the plants are getting established.



A rule of thumb is that plants should have been cultivated three times by the time they are knee high. After that weeds won't be so much of a problem because they will be shaded out. Also, cultivation after that point could damage the shallow and spreading root systems.

If you have enough mulch available, you can mulch between the rows, or once the corn plants have come up you might want to plant vining squash plants around the perimeter of your corn patch. By training the vines into the patch you will create a living mulch that will aid in keeping down the weeds and in conserving moisture. Also corn and squash are companions; that is, they both do a little better when planted near each other than they would when planted alone.

One indicator of ready-to-pick ripeness is that the corn silk will have become brown, but to make sure you will have to pull back part of the husk and press one of the kernels with your thumb. If "milk" squirts out at you, the ear is just right for picking.

The old saying is that for the best flavor you should have the water boiling before you go out to pick the corn and this is one of the advantages of growing your own. You can guarantee this super freshness. Once I get the corn in the pot, I don't cook it longer than 7 or 8 minutes. That is quite enough.

Actually, there are new supersweet varieties of corn that go by names like Kandy Korn E.H., Sugar Sweet and Illini Xtra Sweet. These varieties should remain sweet one or even two days after picking. If you want to try one of these supersweets, it's especially important not to rush the season because they need warmth to germinate successfully.

Note that these special varieties must not cross pollinate with another variety or it will lose its super sweetness. Therefore plan carefully, and plant these at least 400 feet away from any other variety you might plant.

There are many other varieties to choose from. Country Gentleman is an old open-pollinated variety and, along with Golden Bantam, it is a good choice if you would like to save your own seed.

Among the hybrids, you can choose white, yellow or bi-color sweet corn. Golden Cross Bantam Yellow corn is a standard that is widely used for canning and freezing as well as for eating fresh. If you planted Early Sunglow, Golden Beauty and Candystick II (all from Burpee), you would have a long season of yellow corn eating.

Dawn Corn (Vt. Bean Seed Co.) and White Sunglow (Burpee) would give you ripe white corn in only 65 days and you would follow this up with Silver-treat (VBSCO.) and Silver Queen for a long season of white corn.

One of the most popular corns is a bi-color, Butter and Sugar. Burpee also offers Honey and Cream.

No matter how you like it cooked, there is a variety for you. And if you are the rare person who doesn't like to eat corn, you might like to grow it in order to provide your family with an emergency wart remedy. (The secret is to feed the kernels to a rooster just as soon as you have rubbed them on the wart.)

Successful gardeners

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