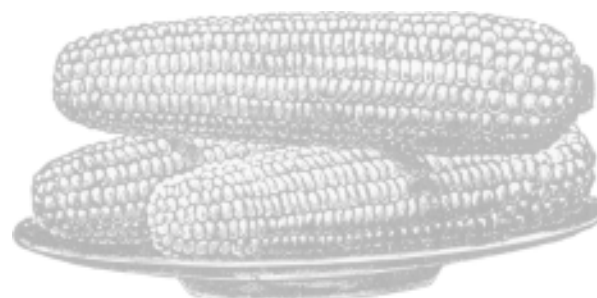




Vegetables for Wellness: Kentucky Corn

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Nothing is more delicious than fresh-picked, Kentucky-grown corn, which we can enjoy from July through August. If you don't have a garden of your own, farmers' markets offer, along with other seasonal fruits and vegetables, sweet corn picked at the peak of ripeness. Everything on the corn plant can be used: the husks for tamales, the silk for medicinal tea, the kernels for food, and the stalks for fodder. Not only is corn popular as food in itself, but its many by-products contribute to Kentucky's agricultural economy, including bourbon, corn flour, cornmeal, corn oil, cornstarch, corn syrup, and laundry starch. What a wonderful and versatile gift the American Indians gave the world!

Nutrition Facts

Corn is low in fat and a good source of fiber and B vitamins. Research shows that if you follow a low-fat, high-fiber diet, you lower your risk of heart disease and certain cancers, giving you even more reason to consume all the corn from the garden or buy a plentiful supply from your local farmers' market.

Selection

Today, more than 200 varieties of corn are available. Yellow corn has large, full-flavored kernels. The kernels of white corn are small and sweet. The super-sweet varieties, while great to eat, are not suitable for canning because the natural sugar in the corn caramelizes and turns brown during processing. It is best to freeze super-sweet varieties in order to preserve them.

Look for ears with green shucks, moist stems, and silk ends that are free of decay. Kernels should be small, tender, plump, milky when pierced, and fill up all the spaces in an ear's rows. The good selection of corn available at farmers' markets will allow you to buy enough, whether it's for dinner or to can or freeze for the same fresh taste through the winter months.

Storage

Since corn can absorb odors from foods such as green onions, avoid storing corn with other produce. Keep unshucked fresh corn in the refrigerator until ready to use, wrapped in damp paper towels and placed in a plastic bag. Corn's natural covering will prevent it from drying out. The typical shelf life of corn is four to six days, so refrigerate it for no more than two days. Each day corn is kept after picking reduces its just-picked fresh taste.

To preserve your garden bounty, can or freeze corn according to USDA-recommended guidelines. One bushel (35 pounds) of sweet corn in husks will produce six to 10 quart jars of whole kernel corn or 14 to 17 frozen pints. Freezing instructions are outlined in the Cooperative Extension Service publication *Freezing Vegetables* (FCS3-335). Canning instructions are outlined in *Canning Vegetables and Vegetable Products* (FCS3-328). Both publications are on the Web at www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/hepubs.htm and are also available at your local Extension office.

Preparation

After shucking, fresh sweet corn can be steamed, boiled, oven-roasted, or grilled and then eaten off the cob by hand. Fresh corn kernels can be used to make corn soup or be added to other soups; used in salads, vegetable sautés, fritters, and relishes; creamed; or made into puddings or soufflés. A Creole version of creamed corn uses fresh red, green, and yellow peppers and fresh basil. Both peppers and basil are generally available from vendors at your local farmers' market.

If you love corn on the cob, corn salsas, chowders, and all the other wonderful ways to prepare corn when it is in season, you may be interested in trying a tool that removes corn kernels. It cuts kernels off the cob, allowing you to move the blade closer if you want creamier corn. Look for it during the summer season at your local cookware store.

When corn is picked, its sugar immediately begins to turn to starch, reducing the corn's natural sweetness. So, it's important to cook corn as soon as possible after you buy it. The Cooperative Extension Service publication *Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens—1999* (ID-133) has more information on successful Kentucky varieties. It can be viewed on the Web at <www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/agpubs.htm>.

To steam: Remove shucks and silk. Trim stem ends. Arrange ears on a rack and steam in a double boiler about 8 to 10 minutes or until tender. Or, stand ears in a tall pot with 1 inch of water in the bottom of the pot. Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid and steam the corn for 5 minutes.

To microwave: Place the ears of corn, still in the shucks, in a single layer in the microwave. Microwave on high for a period equal to 2 minutes times the number of ears, turning the ears halfway through cooking. Allow corn to rest several minutes before removing the shucks and silk.

To boil: Remove shucks and silk. Trim stem ends. Carefully place ears in a large pot of boiling water. Cook 2 to 4 minutes or until the kernels are tender.

To grill: Turn back the inner shucks and remove the silk. Sprinkle each ear with 2 tablespoons of water and nonfat seasonings such as salt, pepper, or herbs. Replace shucks and tie them shut. (Cooking corn in the shucks gives it an earthy, grassy flavor.) Place ears on a hot grill, turning often for 20 to 30 minutes. You can also remove the shucks and silk and wrap the ears in double-folded, heavy-duty aluminum foil. Before wrapping, sprinkle each ear with 2 tablespoons water and seasonings such as salt, pepper, or herbs. Twist the ends of the foil. Cook, turning once, about 10 to 15 minutes until done.

Zucchini and Corn Sauté

2 medium zucchini, thinly sliced
1 medium green pepper, thinly sliced
1 medium sweet red pepper, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons canola oil (optional)
2 cups fresh or frozen corn
1 teaspoon garlic salt, optional
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning

In a large skillet, sauté zucchini and peppers in oil until crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Add remaining ingredients. Sauté 3 to 4 minutes longer or

until the corn is tender. *Nutritional Analysis:* 62 calories, 2 g protein, 9 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 3 g fat, 230 mg sodium. Yield: 10 servings.

—From the Simpson County Cooperative Extension Service.

Scalloped Corn

3 tablespoons flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
Pinch of cayenne pepper
3 tablespoons margarine
1 small green pepper, chopped fine
1/2 onion, chopped fine
1 cup milk
2 cups corn, fresh or canned and drained
1 egg yolk
2/3 cup buttered breadcrumbs

Generously grease a 1 1/2 quart baking dish. Combine flour and seasonings. Sauté green pepper and onion in margarine until tender. Add flour mixture and cook, stirring constantly for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the milk, stirring constantly, and bring to a boil. Stir in corn and egg yolk. Spoon into baking dish and sprinkle with crumbs. Bake at 400°F for 25 minutes, until the crumbs are brown. *Nutritional Analysis:* 110 calories, 3 g protein, 15 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 4 g fat, 31 mg cholesterol, 329 mg sodium. Yield: 16 servings.

For additional in-season recipes, check the home page of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, on the Web at <www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs>.

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