

BUY FRESH - BUY LOCAL

Food of the Week: Sweet Corn

History

If you live in the Midwest, you know that it is sweet corn season once July hits. Nothing compares to the juicy burst of sweet corn on the cob! Iowa is considered America's Corn Belt, producing an estimated 1.88 billion bushels in 2003. If you have traveled across the state of Iowa, you have probably noticed the miles of corn fields. These corn fields make up approximately half of all Iowa farm land.

The Native Americans first introduced us to corn, cultivating corn kernels from seed-bearing grass long before the Europeans discovered the Americas. Corn flourished in regions of North, Central, and South America, and especially along the Ohio River Valley. After the first settlers came to the "New World," the Native Americans began teaching them how to grow, cook, and produce breads and other foods from corn. In fact, history tells us that if it were not for corn, the Pilgrims would have starved during their first year at Plymouth Colony.

Above information adapted from: Iowa Corn Growers Association
<http://www.iowacorn.org/index.html> and What's Cooking America
<http://whatscookingamerica.net/corn.htm>

Availability / Selection / Storage

Availability

Midwest sweet corn is available late summer through early fall. However, Florida sweet corn can be purchased from December through May because their harvest season lasts from the fall through spring.

Selection

The first thing to inspect on an ear of corn is the husks. They should be tight, moist, bright green in color, and free of any brown or moldy spots. When peeling away a bit of the husk, the kernels should be plump yellow and packed in tightly. It is best if the kernels are small at the ends and larger in the middle of the ear. Large kernels at the end of an ear are a sign of overmaturity. The silk should be soft and golden, not brown and dry. It is also best to purchase sweet corn that has been kept in refrigeration or on ice as heat increases the rate of spoilage.

Storage

Ideally, it is best to eat sweet corn right after it has been picked or purchased from the grocery store. If this is not possible, sweet corn can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.

Cooking tip

Corn on the cob only takes a few minutes to cook when submerged in boiling water. Just bring a large pot of water to a boil, throw in the shucked corn, and wait for the water to come back to a boil. And the corn is done!

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Nutrition

Besides tasting great, corn has many health benefits. Corn is a good source of vitamin A, vitamin C and fiber, particularly soluble fiber, which helps decrease cholesterol. Corn bran also helps control blood lipid levels. A study done at the University of Illinois showed that men who consumed 20 grams (just under 1 teaspoon) of corn bran daily for six weeks, along with a low-fat diet, decreased their triglyceride levels by 13%. Another study at Cornell University showed that cooking corn increases its antioxidant level. Antioxidants help protect the body from free radicals, which have been linked to heart disease and cancer. The bottom line is that corn is very good for you!

Corn Facts

- One medium ear of corn equals approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of corn kernels.
- A serving size of corn is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.
- Corn is America's number one field crop.
- Corn is used to produce ethanol, a fuel alcohol that is mixed with gasoline. Ethanol gas reduces the amount of pollution cars create, while allowing us to travel more miles on one tank of gas.

Nutrient Analysis of 1 ear of corn: calories: 77, fat: 1g, cholesterol: 0mg, protein: 3g, carbohydrate: 17g, potassium: 243mg, sodium: 14mg, vitamin A: 253 IU, vitamin C: 2mg, fiber: 2g

Recipe of the Week: Garlicky Corn on the Cob

Makes 6 servings

- 1 tsp lemon zest
- 2 T. soy sauce
- 4 T. olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Pepper to taste
- 6 ears corn, husked

Combine all, marinate overnight, wrap in foil, and grill 30 minutes.

Nutrient analysis of 1 serving: calories: 161, carbohydrate: 18g, protein: 3g, fat: 10, saturated fat: 1g, monounsaturated fat: 7g, polyunsaturated fat: 1g, cholesterol: 0mg, potassium: 270mg, sodium: 340mg
Recipe Source: Iowa State University Extension

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
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Helping Iowans become their best.

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