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TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Easy Gardening

SWEET CORN • SWEET CORN • SWEET CORN • SWEET

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Sweet corn is a member of the grass family. In smaller gardens, it should be planted in square blocks instead of long rows to improve cross-pollination between corn stalks. Like most vegetables, corn will grow best in areas with plenty of sunlight.

Corn is one of the plants grown in the traditional Native American vegetable technique call the Three Sisters. The other two plants in the Three Sisters are beans and squash, and each had its role in this companion planting tradition. Corn served as a support for the vining beans. Squash served as a ground cover, preventing weeds from growing. Beans provided natural fertilizer for all.

Site selection

Corn can tolerate many soil types but prefers well-drained soils with a pH between 5.5 and 7.0. In sandy soils or soils with a low pH, corn may suffer from magnesium deficiency.

Varieties

Normal sugary	Sugary enhanced (se)	Shrunken (sh2)
Bonanza Merit Silver Queen Sweet G-90	Ambrosia Argent Bodacious Golden Queen Kandy Korn Legend Tendertreat	Crisp-N-Sweet Florida Staysweet Frontier Honey n Pearl How Sweet It Is Mirai Summer Sweet
Popcorn		
Robust White Strawberry		

Soil preparation

Remove weeds, rocks and trash, and work the top 8 to 10 inches of soil before planting. Work the soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to garden tools.

Fertilizing

Use 2 to 3 pounds of fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, for every 100 square feet of garden area. Spread the fertilizer evenly over the soil and work it into the soil 3 to 4 inches deep. Rake the soil to smooth the surface.

Planting

Sweet corn is a warm-season crop and must be planted after the soil warms and there is no more danger of frost. If you have room, plant again when the first corn plants have three to five leaves. This usually takes 2 to 3 weeks.

You will need 1 to 2 ounces of seed for every 100 feet of row. Do not use seed saved from last year's sweet corn as these seeds will not grow a good crop.

Sweet corn grows best when planted in several short rows instead of one long row. This makes it easier for the corn plants to pollinate, and good pollination is necessary for ears of corn to have plump, juicy kernels.

Figure 1. **Plant corn in several short rows, not in one or two long rows.**

Figure 2. **Poorly filled corn is caused by poor pollination.**

Plant the corn seeds about 1 inch deep and 3 to 4 inches apart in the row. Space the rows 2½ to 3 feet apart. After the plants are up, thin them to 1 foot apart. If you plant them closer, your corn will have small, poorly-filled ears (Figs. 1 and 2.)

Watering

Water sweet corn as needed to keep it from wilting. Do not let corn suffer from lack of water when the kernels are forming.

Care during the season

Hoe or till the soil just under the surface. Hoe the weeds off just below the soil's surface. Deep hoeing will cut the corn roots, which are close to the top of the soil.

When the plants are about 2 feet tall, apply 1 cup of fertilizer for every 10 feet of garden row. Scatter the fertilizer evenly between the rows and mix it lightly with the soil. Water after fertilizing (Fig. 3.)

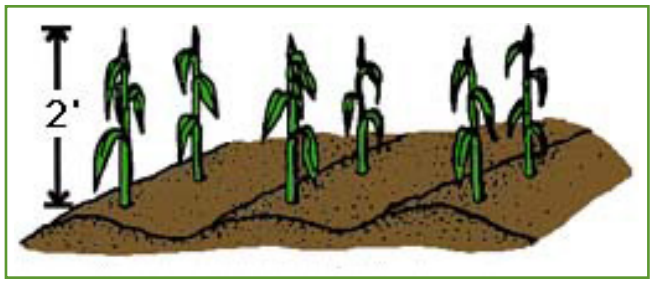


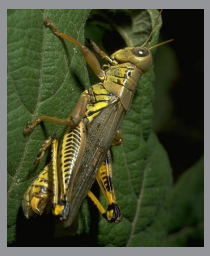
Figure 3. **When corn is about 2 feet tall, scatter 1 cup of fertilizer for every 10 feet of row and water it in.**

Diseases

If a few of your corn plants are stunted, they may have a viral disease and should be removed to keep the virus from spreading.

Harvesting

Corn is ready for harvest about 3 weeks after the tassel grows on top of the corn plant. Corn is ripe when juice from the kernels is milky white, the silk on the ears has turned dark brown, the ears are firm, and kernels on the tips of the unhusked ears are plump and milky. Sweet corn is not ready when the juice of the kernel is watery. It is overripe when the

Name and description		Control
Corn earworm	Larva: Green, brown or pink, light strips along sides and on back; up to 1¾ inches long. Adult: Light to dark brown, or light olive green, with a wingspan of about 1½ inches.	Sevin® Bt garlic juice extracts
European corn borer	Larvae are pinkish tan; adults are tan and about ½ inch long and hold their wings in a delta shape at rest.	Bt garlic juice extracts
Fall armyworm	Young larvae have light bodies and black heads; fully grown larvae are 1⅓ inches long with three yellowish-white lines down the back; adult moths are ¾ inch long and 1½ inches wide with gray wings and irregular white spots near the ends.	azadirachtin Bt garlic juice extracts kaolin spinosad
Flea beetle	Completely black beetle 1⁄16 inch long.	crop rotation resistant varieties permethrin Sevin® garlic juice extracts azadirachtin
 Grasshopper	Grasshoppers are chewing insects with mandibles that tear off food. They make sounds by rubbing their hind legs together.	garlic juice extracts azadirachtin pyrethrin Sevin®

kernels get large, chewy and pasty like dough.

The best time to pick corn is in the early morning or evening when it is cool. To harvest the ears, hold the stalk below the ear and twist the tip of the ear toward the ground until it breaks off. Cook the corn right away, or store it in the refrigerator until mealtime. Corn loses flavor and nutrients quickly when left at high temperature. Watch the corn closely because the quality changes fast.

Serving

Corn has small amounts of many vitamins and minerals and is best when cooked immediately after picking. It can be cooked either on or off the cob. Remove husks, silk and bad spots just before cooking. Corn which is past its best quality is still good as cream-style corn.

Storing

Store corn in the husk. Place it uncovered in the refrigerator for 1 or 2 days. Corn stored for more than 2 days loses its sweetness.

Cleanup

Old corn plants are good compost to add to the garden soil. They will break down much faster if shredded before composting.

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