

BETTER KNOW YOUR VEGETABLES:

This Week . . . King Corn

No food evokes America quite like corn. Indigenous to Mexico and Central America, maize was a staple grain in the diets of the Aztecs, Incas, and other native cultures dating back as far as 7,000 years. Christopher Columbus was introduced to specimens in dazzling hues (red, blue, pink, and black with solid, spotted, and striped patterns), a sad and vivid reminder of the steep decline in crop biodiversity under our industrial farming system. Add this grim fact to the picture: over half of the acreage planted in the United States has been genetically modified for pest or herbicide resistance— not surprising if you consider how we treat corn less like a foodstuff and more like a commodity that can literally be bought and sold on the stock market.

Though the US is the world's largest producer, the vast majority of corn isn't destined for American stomachs. According to the USDA statistics from 1996, here's where our corn ended up:

6.1 billion bushels for animal feed / 2.1 B exported for people and animals overseas / 1.6 B processed into ethanol / 755 million bushels refined into corn sweeteners / 275 M processed into starch for food and industrial use (for latex paint, pharmaceuticals, plastics, toothpaste, carpet, firecrackers, spark plugs and more!) / 190 M for snack food and cereal / 135 M bushels fermented into alcohol

The corn we actually do consume is very different from those varieties of industrial corn. Sweet corn is picked in an immature state, before the kernels have dried into grain. Because of its high sugar content, it doesn't keep well. Eat corn close to the time it was picked since it can quickly lose its flavor.

Basic Corn on the Cob

From The Fannie Farmer Cookbook by Marion Cunningham

Just before cooking, husk the corn, pull off the silky threads, and cut out any blemishes with a pointed knife. Drop the corn into a large pot filled with boiling salted water. Cover the pot and let the water return to a boil again, then turn off the heat and keep the pot covered. After about 5 minutes, remove enough ears for a first serving. You can keep the remaining corn warm in the water for another 10 minutes without its becoming tough. Serve with lots of butter and salt.

Chipotle-Corn Salad

Adapted from Food & Wine

5 ears of corn	1/2 medium Vidalia or Walla Walla onion, thickly sliced crosswise
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil	1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons sour cream
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice	2 chipotle chiles in adobo sauce, seeded and finely chopped
1 scallion, thinly sliced	Salt and freshly ground pepper

Light a grill or preheat a grill pan. Brush the corn and onion slices with the olive oil and grill over moderately high heat until charred in spots but still slightly crisp, about 7 minutes. Let cool slightly, then cut the kernels from the cobs.

Coarsely chop the onion. Alternately, chop the onion and remove the corn from the cob. Cook the onion until barely translucent, add the corn, and sauté over medium high heat until lightly colored. In a medium bowl, mix the sour cream with the lime juice, chopped chipotle chiles and sliced scallion and stir in the charred corn and onions. Season the corn salad with salt and pepper and serve immediately.

CORN LEXICON

corn fed - 1. fed on corn: a corn fed hog. 2. slang healthy and strong, but provincial and unsophisticated.

corny - 1. archaic: tasting strongly of malt 2. of or relating to corn 3. mawkishly old fashioned; tirelessly simple and sentimental 4. relating to or having corns on the feet.

Corn Night - aka Mischief Night. A tradition in England and Scotland of a night in the calendar when the custom is for young people to be given a degree of permission by society to play pranks and do mischief to their neighbors.

DON'T FORGET

The next Lewis Waite delivery is scheduled for September 13. Be sure to place your order one week in advance!