2020 is the Year of the Corn

Whether picked fresh from the garden or purchased from the farmers market or local produce aisle, sweet corn continues to be among America's favorite vegetable.

Why is it so popular?
Versatility! Eaten straight off the cob or included in side dishes, appetizers, entrees, and even desserts; sweet corn can be enjoyed prepared as part of a sweet or savory dish or even popped for a popular snack. Abundant, adaptable and highly versatile, sweet corn is woven into the fabric of our country's heritage. First grown by several Native American tribes and given to the Europeans by the Iroquois, the vegetable quickly became a fan favorite.

Did You Know?
There are many types of corn used for different applications, the four most well-known are Field, Ornamental, Popcorn, and Sweet.

- **Field corn (Dent corn)** is grown primarily to feed livestock and is left on the stalk to dry in the field. Though edible for human consumption field corn is not nearly as tasty as sweet corn.
- **Ornamental corn** exhibits elongated kernels and varied color patterns. This corn is grown primarily for its decorative purposes and is typically dried and used for Fall decorations.
- **Popcorn** comes from a special type of corn bred for its ability to expand and puff up when heated. When dried down the kernels can be popped for a healthy snack. The majority of popcorn sold worldwide is produced in the U.S.
- **Sweet corn** is the most popular corn due to its fresh-tasting sweetness and is readily available in year-round. Sweet corn is also found canned and options. Homegrown sweet corn is easy to grow and is a wonderful summertime staple. The sweet corn we enjoy today is the result of a naturally occurring mutation in the genes which control the conversion of sugar to starch inside the corn kernels.

Tips For The Home Gardener
- Plant corn seed in the spring once soil temperatures have reached at least 60° F. Harvest in 66 to 80 days.
- Seeds (kernels) should be planted 1- 1/2 inches deep and 9-12 inches apart. Each stalk should produce at least one ear of corn. Plant in a two-week succession for an extended corn season.
- Corn is pollinated by the wind so plant in blocks of rows of a single hybrid (as opposed to fewer, longer rows) for good pollination and well-filled ears. Note which type of corn you will be growing because some corn seeds need to be isolated from other types of corn categories for good corn ear development.
- Choose a location that has at least 6 hours of sunlight a day.
• Be sure your corn plants receive about 1” of water per week, especially during the drier times of the season.

• Corn are heavy feeders, especially of nitrogen. Pale green leaves are a sign of nitrogen deficiency. Purple-tinged leaves are a sign of phosphorus deficiency. It is recommended to add fertilizer throughout the growing season if your soil is deficient.

• Corn plants have shallow roots that can be damaged with deep weeding, so lightly hoe or hand weed the area.

• Watch closely for the ear to start showing corn silk – it will be ready to pick about 20 days later.

• To harvest the corn, grab the ear and twist with a downward motion. Some stalks may grow a second ear of corn and will be ready for picking at a later date.

• If you find a caterpillar or chewed-up area of the kernels it is likely a Corn Earworm. Cut off the affected part of the ear off with a knife and cook the rest of the ear.

• Fresh picked sweet corn can be stored for about a week in your refrigerator. If you need to keep it longer, consider freezing for use later in the year.

• Don’t throw away your silks! You can use the corn silk you collect to make corn silk tea, which can boost digestion, reduce blood sugar, and flood your body with antioxidants.

Ready to grow your own?!

Try these AAS Winner varieties:

American Dream F1
Honey Select F1
Honey ’N Pearl F1
How Sweet It Is F1

For more varieties, visit ngb.org

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