

Florida Food Fare

by Jean Meadows and Mary King
Family & Consumer Sciences
University of Florida / IFAS
Sarasota County Extension



Sweet Corn

Description: Technically, corn is not a vegetable, but a grain native to the Americas. Aztecs, Mayans, Incas and North American tribes cultivated maize many years before the Pilgrims arrived. One of the greatest gifts the Indians gave to the settlers of Colonial America was the ability to cultivate corn. Since it grew well in poor soil and needed little skill to cultivate, corn quickly became a staple crop of the colonists. Sweet corn has long been an all-time favorite food. Today's varieties are well-developed hybrids that have superior yields, appearance and flavor. Silver Queen corn contains even rows of clear white, tender juicy kernels. Another popular variety, bi-colored corn, has both yellow and white tender and moist kernels. Summer Sweet corn is a newer all yellow variety, which stays sweet longer, giving us exceptional corn in May and June.

Availability: Florida sweet corn is available from October to July, though it is most plentiful in April and May. Florida leads the nation in the production of fresh sweet corn. A total of 544.1 million pounds of fresh sweet corn valued at \$122 million was produced on 37,000 acres in Florida during the 2000-2001 season. Florida is the nation's major source of sweet corn during many months of the year, especially during the winter and early spring. Sweet corn is available year round in the grocery store. It can be frozen quite successfully and may also be canned.

Nutritional Value: Corn is low in sodium and fat, high in carbohydrates and cholesterol free. One medium ear of corn yields 75 calories, 1 g fat, 2 g dietary fiber, and 19 g total carbohydrates. It also contains 191 mg potassium, 79 mg phosphorus, 4.7 mg vitamin C, 35.7 mcg folate, 167 IU vitamin A, and 1.5 mg calcium.

Selection and care: As soon as it is picked, corn's sugar begins to convert to starch, which in turn, lessens the corn's natural sweetness. The rule is: the less time from the field to the fire, the better. Sweet corn should be cooled as quickly

as possible to prevent the loss of sugar. Fresh corn is best when used the same day it is picked. If storing, refrigerate unhusked, in a plastic bag up to 2 days.

When supply is plentiful, buy extra and freeze. When purchasing corn, look for ears with bright green, snugly fitting husks and moist, golden brown silks. Kernels should be tender, plump and milky, and come all the way to the ear's tip. Rows should be tightly spaced. Remove husks and silks just before cooking.

Buying frozen corn: Commercially packaged corn on the cob is usually of excellent quality because in the processing refrigerated trucks are taken into the corn fields where the corn is cut, cleaned, packaged and put into refrigeration within 10 minutes. This keeps the corn sweet and prevents the sugar from converting to starch

Use and Preparation: Because of its versatility and flavor, corn has long been an important staple in every region of the U.S. Corn meal and corn flour are popular in Southwestern cuisine. An all-American favorite is boiled or grilled corn on the cob. Corn is a favorite ingredient in soups, desserts, casseroles, salads and main dishes. **To freeze whole cobs:** Remove husks and silks. Place corn in boiling water. When the water returns to a boil, blanch 4 minutes for small, 6 minutes for medium ears and 8 minutes for large ears. Immediately cool in ice water for the same length of time as for blanching. Drain well, freeze in plastic wrap or freezer bags. Thaw before reheating. Place corn in boiling water, bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer until tender (3 to 4 minutes). Remove from heat.

Recipes:

Grilled Corn on the Cob

Soak fresh ears in water for 20 to 30 minutes with the husks on. Cook on grill rack over medium heat for 40 to 60 minutes, turning often. When cooked, the husks and silks slide off easily.

Corn Pudding

2 cups corn, cut from the cob	3 eggs, slightly beaten
2 teaspoons sugar	2 tablespoons butter or margarine
1 teaspoon salt	2 cups low fat milk (do not use fat free milk)
1/8 teaspoon pepper	

Combine corn, sugar, salt and pepper in a bowl. Add eggs and mix well. Add butter to milk in a saucepan and heat until butter is melted. Blend with corn mixture. Turn into a greased 1 quart casserole and place in a pan of hot water.

Bake at 350 degrees F. for an hour or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Garnish with fresh parsley. Serves 6.

Southwestern Summer Succotash

1 1/2 cups green beans, in 1-inch pieces	1/3 cup water
1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil	2 small yellow summer squashes, diced
1 large onion, chopped	1 small hot chili pepper, seeded, minced or 4-ounce can mild green chilies, chop
2 cloves garlic, minced	1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
3 cups fresh uncooked corn kernels	Salt and pepper
1 heaping cup chopped ripe tomatoes	

Steam the green beans until they are tender-crisp. Rinse immediately under cold water, set aside. Heat oil in heavy, deep saucepan. Add onion and garlic and sauté until tender. Add remaining ingredients except green beans and stir together well. Cover and simmer gently for about 20 minutes, until corn and squash are just done. Add the green beans and simmer for another 3 to 5 minutes. Serves 6 or more.

Corn Fritters

1 cup fresh or frozen whole kernel corn. cooked and drained	1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1 egg	1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons flour	1 egg white, beaten stiff

Chop corn, add egg. Sift together dry ingredients. Stir in corn, fold in egg white. Drop from a tablespoon into hot oil. Cook until lightly browned. Drain on paper towel. For apple fritters, finely chopped apples may be substituted for the corn.

Florida Sweet Corn Chowder

2 strips bacon (raw), diced small	3 cups chicken or vegetable stock
1/2 cup Florida onion, diced small	1 cup russet potatoes, diced medium
1/2 cup Florida red pepper, diced small	1 cup fat free half and half
2 cups Florida sweet corn, cut from cob	1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
3 tablespoons flour	Salt & pepper to taste

Render bacon over medium-high heat in a large sauce pan until crisp; add onions, peppers, and sweet corn and stir for approximately 2 minutes. Add flour and stir for one minute; add stock and stir until smooth, bring to a boil, add

potatoes and simmer for 15-20 minutes to desired consistency; add half and half and simmer 2 more minutes. Season with fresh parsley, salt, and pepper. Yield: approximately 1 quart.