

## **Corn**

Fresh corn tastes so much better than store-bought or market corn that it's almost a different vegetable. Although corn takes up a lot of space in the home garden, it's well worth it.

### **Varieties**

For a harvest throughout the summer and into the fall, plant some early, mid-season, and late varieties. Both popcorn and supersweet corn hybrids (labeled supersweet, extra sweet, shrunken 2, or Sh2 in catalogs) grow well in home gardens, but you must isolate them to prevent cross-pollination with other varieties. Sugary enhanced (SE) or everlasting heritage (EH) varieties need no isolation.

### **Planting**

Wait until the soil is completely warm before sowing corn seeds, which will rot in cool, damp soil. For rapid growth, warm days and nights are critical. Corn is wind-pollinated, so plant corn in a block of three or four short rows, rather than in one long row. To provide an initial food supply for the seeds, dig a furrow 3 inches deep and sprinkle any complete fertilizer along the bottom. Cover the fertilizer with a thin layer of soil, then plant the seeds 1 inch below the original soil level. Space seeds about 4 inches apart in rows 2 feet apart. If you plant corn in hills, space the hills about 3 feet apart and sow five seeds to a hill.

Isolate varieties to avoid cross-pollination. For instance, if allowed to cross-pollinate, popcorn can ruin sweet corn and sweet corn can ruin supersweet hybrids. Isolate either by time (plant so crops tassel 10 days apart) or by space (have 1,000 feet between different varieties).

Obviously, the easiest and most practical method for home gardeners is to isolate by time.

### **Care**

After the seedlings emerge, surround them with mulch (except in cool, wet areas). Keep plants well watered. When the stalks are a foot high,

side-dress with fertilizer. Do this one more time when the plants begin to tassel.

Keep an eye out for smut, which forms a big gray to black ball on infected ears. Remove and destroy the smut ball immediately.

Protect the crop from deer and raccoons by building a high fence around the patch. Run a wire around the top and connect it to a battery. Other simple tricks some gardeners use to keep out marauders--such as growing pumpkins and squash beside the corn--do not work.

## **Harvest**

Pick ears when the kernels fill out and exude a milky substance when punctured with a fingernail. Because the pointed tips of the ears mature last, you'll need to husk one or two ears to judge whether a crop is mature. Other signs of ripeness include brown silk, a deep green color, and a firm, full feel (squeeze the ear). Pick corn just before you cook it because corn sugar starts turning into starch immediately after it's picked. The supersweet and sugary enhanced (SE or EH) corns stay fresher longest.