

GRAND TOUR

Food

AAAHHH...SWEET SUMMER CORN!

By Gena Bell

BRIGHT GREEN HUSKS SURROUNDING WHITE OR YELLOW tender kernels mean only one thing—yes, it's sweet corn season! Who doesn't love sweet corn? Sweet corn season is for all of us, including non-veggie lovers.

The earliest record of corn dates back to eighth-century Guatemala. Sweet corn, the varieties that Americans consume today, was first cultivated around 1850. Sweet corn is produced exclusively for human consumption, as opposed to field corn which is used for animal feed and industrial use. The sweet corn mutation causes the endosperm (inner area) of the seed to accumulate about two times more sugar than field corn. Today there are over a hundred varieties of sweet corn, which means that from May through September corn should be a staple for most summertime meals.

One of the most popular ways to eat corn is right off the cob. Whether you boil it in a large pot of steamy salt water or barbecue it over piping hot coals, sinking your teeth into a plump, moist cob is a great sensation. I love fresh steamed corn on the cob rolled in melted butter, seasoned with chili powder, lime juice and a pinch of salt. This mixture gives the sweet corn ear a tangy flavor that is terrific with Mexican food or grilled meat.

Sweet corn can also be cut off the cob and used in a variety of dishes. Puddings, savory cakes, drinks, soups, side dishes and desserts are just a few things you can make with fresh sweet corn. Many of us are familiar with Thanksgiving corn pudding, but usually frozen or canned corn is used because fresh sweet corn is not available that time of year. Summertime is a great time to add fresh sweet corn to that same recipe. Notice what great flavor it adds to your pudding!

What makes sweet corn a great vegetable to use in cooking is not only its wonderful flavor, but you can use it to create foods that can be served hot, cold or at room temperature. My family makes a traditional side dish called Indian Corn (that is, it's a tradition in our family). This dish consists of 4 cups of fresh sweet corn, 3 slices of chopped bacon, 1 onion, 1 diced red bell pepper, and salt, pepper and add cumin to taste. Add the ingredients along with a little butter to a large cast-iron skillet and sauté until heated through. Indian Corn can be served warm or at room temperature, eaten as a side dish or all by itself.

Sweet corn desserts are interesting, and for many of us, an experimental category. Sweet Corn Crème Brulee is a new and innovative dessert seen in many fine dining restaurants during the summer months. Take your traditional crème brulee mixture of whipping cream, half & half, eggs and sugar, and add a cup of sweet corn. Stir the mixture gently and pour into ceramic dishes and bake in a water bath. This makes a delicious and

refreshing dessert that is not too sweet, but very satisfying after dinner. Another sweet treat is Sweet Corn Cakes. These pancake-like creations are a popular breakfast dessert served in many Southern homes and restaurants. Use a traditional cornbread recipe and add fresh sweet corn and cook over a hot griddle. Drizzle a fine stream of hot maple syrup over the top and suddenly you are in the Carolinas. Sweet Corn Fritters are another southern delicacy made with fresh sweet corn and relatively simple to prepare (recipe below).


There are many ways to eat fresh summer sweet corn. It's easy to prepare and a wonderful addition to any meal. Whether you prefer white or yellow sweet corn, now is the time to grab a bushel or two and create some favorite summertime foods.

SWEET CORN FRITTERS

Makes 4 Servings

1 quart vegetable oil
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cornmeal
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon sugar
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
1 egg
2 cups fresh sweet corn kernels
maple syrup, optional
powdered sugar, optional

DIRECTIONS

1. Place oil into a large pot and heat to 375 degrees. In a large bowl, combine all dry ingredients.
2. In another small bowl, combine wet ingredients, including corn.
3. Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and stir gently, just until combined.
4. Drop rounded tablespoons of fritter batter into hot oil and cook for 4 to 5 minutes until golden brown.
5. Drain on a platter covered in paper towel and reserve in warm oven until all are done.
6. Serve with maple syrup, a sprinkling of powdered sugar or all by themselves. Enjoy! 

Gena Bell is a food writer/consultant and a certified pastry chef and resides in the San Francisco Bay area.

