

HOME HORTICULTURE

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Michigan
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Information Packet was Compiled from the Michigan State University Home Horticulture Database.

Sweet Corn, Popcorn

The cultural requirements for both sweet corn *Z. m. saccharata* and popcorn, *Zea antiqua* are given. Although both types of corn are included in one section they should not be grown together in the garden. If grown close together there will be sweet corn on popcorn ears and popcorn on sweet corn ears. Corn is the one crop that crosses when several types are grown together. Both types of corn require full sun and a well-drained soil. The normal planting time is May 20 to the first of June. Some gardeners gamble and plant earlier as it takes a while for the corn to come up. The seed is planted 2 to 2 1/2 inches deep with the plants 10 to 12 inches apart in the rows. Corn is often grown in hills with 4 to 6 seeds planted per hill. The rows or hills are spaced 30 to 36 inches apart. Sweet corn varieties, which mature at different times, may be used so yield will be staggered. Over crowding corn will reduce the quality and yield. If the garden was not fertilized, use 1 cup of 12-12-12 per 25 feet of row. Spread the fertilizer in a one-foot wide band. Sidedress when the plants are knee high and again when the tassels appear. Apply the sidedressing in a one-foot band on either side of the row using 1 cup of fertilizer per 50 feet of row. If the older leaves turn yellow or the younger leaves are pale green, give the corn more nitrogen. Watering is important from tasseling to harvest, especially with sweet corn. Popcorn should be well watered from the time the silks appear to the time the kernels are developing. Leave the suckers on the plants.

Sweet corn is harvested while the husk is dark green. The corn is usually sweetest just as the silk blackens. The kernels should pop readily when pressed and the juice from the kernels should be milky. If the juice is clear, the corn is not ready. If the juice is pasty, the corn is probably too old. The top ears generally mature one or two days before the lower ears.

Popcorn is left on the plant to mature and is ready to harvest when the husks are dry and the kernels hard. Pick popcorn before frost, husk the ears and place them in a mesh bag or old nylon stocking to cure. Curing takes 2 to 3 weeks and is done in a warm, dry, well-ventilated area.

Sweet Corn Facts

Availability: August through mid September

Days to Maturity: 70 to 90 days

Approximate Yield/10 feet of row: 1 dozen ears

Per Person Requirements: Fresh: 10 to 15 feet of row and Preservation: 30 to 50 feet of row

Weights: 1 bushel (in husks) = 35 pounds, 14 to 17 pints frozen and 6 to 10 quarts canned

2 to 2 1/2 pounds fresh = 1 pint frozen

3 to 6 pounds fresh = 1 quart canned

Corn Insects

Seed Corn Maggot

Legless maggots attack and destroy the seed during or before sprouting.

European Corn Borer

The larvae feed on the leaves then bore into the stem. The insects are a problem from late May to early June and they may go from the leaves to the ears. There are two generations per year.

Corn Earworm

The adults lay eggs in the silks in mid-August. The larvae hatch out and enter the tip of the ear in 4 to 5 days. The larvae feed on the kernels once under the husk.

Corn Leaf Aphid

These blue green aphids suck sap from the plants and are often on the undersides of the leaves or in the tassel. The honeydew attracts corn earworm adults.

Sap Beetles

Sap beetles are black, with 4 orange or yellow spots. The insects are attracted by injury to the corn whether the source of the injury is other insects or the gardener checking for ripeness.

Corn Diseases

Smut

The disease produces fleshy, irregular, white galls on the stem, ears and tassels. The mature galls are brown and contain dark, powdery spores. The disease overwinters in the soil and dry conditions and temperatures between 79 and 99 degrees Fahrenheit favor its development.