

## **Sweetcorn**

Maize is a member of the grass family Poaceae and is one of the most important human dietary cereal grains in Latin America and Africa and the second most abundant cultivated cereal worldwide.

Maize originated in the Americas and was introduced to Europe, Asia and Africa during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. This versatile grain is used for human food, animal feed and as a source of raw material for industry.

In the UK we consume fresh maize, known as sweetcorn or corn on the cob. Other common maize products are cornflakes, popcorn, cornmeal and polenta. Tortillas are made from maize meal.

Sweetcorn is a variety of maize with a higher sugar content. How does this happen?

Sweet corn is the result of a naturally occurring recessive mutation in the genes, which control the conversion of sugar to starch inside the endosperm of the corn kernel. Field corn varieties are usually harvested when the kernels are very dry and fully mature, whilst sweetcorn is picked when immature and eaten as a vegetable rather than a grain. The process of maturation involves converting sugar into starch, therefore sweetcorn kernels are generally low in starch and are soft juicy and full of sweet flavour. The older the kernels get, the more tough and starchy they become.

The fruit of the sweetcorn are called the corn kernels. The ear is a collection of kernels on the cob. The ear is covered by tightly wrapped leaves called the husk. Silk is the name for the flowers which emerge from the husk. The husk and silk are removed by hand before cooking. At their best, the husks should be green and fresh and the tassel at the end should be fine and silky, to indicate that the corn has not long been picked. The fresher the better.

To wipe silk off an ear of corn, rub with a wet paper towel. To cut kernels off the cob, stand it on end and run a sharp paring knife straight down the sides.

Grilling is one of the easiest and most delicious ways to cook corn — the heat caramelises the natural sugars, imparting a sweeter, more intense flavour than boiling. To grill corn, use a hot fire and simply toss the ears on the grill, silk and all. (If you want a smokier flavour, first remove a few layers of the husk) With the summer around the corner, try to barbeque corn on the cob!

Sweetcorn can also be boiled or steamed.

Sweetcorn is available fresh or frozen all year round in most supermarkets. Tinned sweetcorn is a handy store cupboard ingredient and could help you fix up a quick meal. Baby corn varieties are also available, however a bit more expensive.

The nutritional content of one medium corn on the cob is:

88-100 kcal  
1 g of fat  
2.6 g of protein  
2.2 g of fibre

