



CORN

Zea mays

Corn is a versatile, highly productive, tasty starch that is easy to grow, process, and store. Dent corn is the best for making tortillas, and is a lower-demand crop than sweet corn. It can grow well with less water and fertilizer, and gives high yields.

PLANTING

We recommend transplanting corn to get a jump on the season. Use small plug trays or cardboard egg cartons. We start seed in mid-April and transplant the first week in May. Wait for the soil to warm up (usually mid-May) before direct-seeding. Plant seed 8-12" apart in rows 18"-2 1/2' apart. Don't plant too close together if you are dry-farming. Corn appreciates nitrogen so work in some manure or feed with blood meal if necessary.

GROWING METHODS

MAINTENANCE

A few rounds of weeding are needed, and a round of organic high-nitrogen fertilizer when knee high is good if plants look yellowish. Hilling up some soil around the plants helps prevent lodging later in the season and controls weeds simultaneously. We don't water our corn but if your soil is very well drained or you garden in raised beds you will need to water. Do not water once the ears are fully developed as they need to dry down.

HARVEST

Ears of corn are typically left on the stalk until fully dry. If prolonged heavy rains threaten or if damage from wildlife is apparent, corn can be harvested before fully dry if the ears are mature. Shuck the cobs and lay them out in a dry location in a single layer or braid together by the pulled-back leaves and hang to dry.

THRESHING

Once fully dry, kernels can be removed easily from the cob by hand, or with a small hand-held corn-threshing tool, or a cast-iron hand-crank corn thresher. Corn can be stored on the cob for long periods of time if dry so there is no rush in the threshing unless it is taking up too much space.

PROCESSING

SEED-SAVING/STORAGE

Corn will readily cross-pollinate so be sure nearby varieties have quite different maturity (pollination) dates. Be especially cautious of planting sweet corn and other corn types nearby as the starch is not appreciated in the sweet corn and vice versa. To prevent inbreeding depression, save a mixture of seeds from 25-50 ears if possible. Be sure corn is well-dried before storage, then store in air-tight containers.

COOKING TIPS

For tortillas, dissolve 2 T slaked lime ("cal") in 2 Qt water over high heat. Add 4 cups dry dent corn. Simmer for 2 minutes, then let sit overnight. Strain into colander, rub kernels briskly under water until the water runs clean. Grind in a meat grinder or hand-crank flour grinder to make a wet dough. Roll into balls and press flat to fry into tortillas. 30 seconds on each side in a very hot cast iron pan will do it. Makes 3-4 dozen tortillas. Freezes well.

YIELDS & LABOR

We yielded about 6 gallons of dent corn in a 150 SF area, using about 10 hours of total labor. One source gives 10 dozen ears per 100 row feet as a common yield.

BBGP RESEARCH

VARIETIES

Nothstine is the earliest dent corn we have trialed. Oaxacan Green and Mandan Bride also matured when planted as transplants. Painted Mountain is a good early-season flour corn.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

BBGP is experimenting in 2011 with early-maturing varieties of flint and flour corn. These lend more versatility to the diet and make great polenta and cornbread.