

What's in Season from the Garden State

Biweekly Highlights from Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

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Sweet corn has never been a vegetable that is sold by variety the way apples are marketed. If you purchase sweet corn from a local farmer, however, they will likely list or tell you which variety they have for sale. Generally speaking, local farms sell predominately *se*, Synergistic, and Augmented types. Corn purchased from large national chains will probably be selling mostly *sh2* super sweet types due to its extended shelf life characteristics.

Would our Parents Recognize Today's New Sweet Corns?

Ray Samulis, Agricultural Agent, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Burlington County

It wasn't too many years ago when choosing sweet corn was a simple task since there was really only one type, namely *su* or standard sugary types. These sweet corns had great corn taste, moderate levels of sugars, but unfortunately had a very short shelf life. The conversion of sugar to starch was very rapid and thus the eating quality of the sweet corn deteriorated in about one day. Plant breeders some years ago identified genes in sweet corn that produced ears that were considerably sweeter than the standard type sweet corn such as Silver Queen. This type of corn called *sh2* varieties also had a much longer shelf life up to 7 days. However, while *sh2* corn was sweeter, it lacked the creamy corn flavor and had a much tougher pericary (seed skin) that yielded a very crunchy texture while eating. It became a personal preference as to what type of corn you liked best - very sweet taste vs. creamy corn taste.

It wasn't long until plant breeders came up with a new type of sweet corn which was a compromise between the *su* and *sh2* types. This type of sweet corn was known as *se* or sugar enhanced sweet corn with varieties such as Argent which we have today. The *se* category of sweet corn has higher sugars than *su* and better eating quality than many of the *sh2* sweet corns. Each of these type sweet corns has new challenges to growing them for the farmer. With *sh2* types for example, the seeds are very shriveled with very limited food reserves for the young seedlings to use. As a result, growers have to plant super sweet varieties much later than the other types of sweet corn so that the soil is very warm and the seedlings have near ideal growing conditions.

Plant breeding evolves continually from season to season much like advancements in the computer industry. In only a few short years, the types of new sweet corn developed have exploded and currently we have at least 9 new types of sweet corn genetic grouping that include Synergistic types (both homozygous and heterozygous groupings) that include triple sweet types such as Cinderella, and Augmented types such as the various Gourmet Sweet types. A complete discussion of these new types is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say we now have sweet corn types for all different tastes and palates.

Over my 30 years researching sweet corn, I think the bottom line axiom is that the fresher the corn is, the better its flavor, sweetness, and eating quality. Regardless of where you get your sweet corn, be sure to enjoy this locally grown American classic vegetable as often as you can since New Jersey season only lasts from July 1 to September 20 each year.

New Jersey Department of
Agriculture's Jersey Fresh &
Seafood Availability Report

Current:	Peas
Arugula	Radishes
Asparagus - finishing up	Spinach
Baby Arugula & Baby Spinach	Squash - yellow and zucchini
Basil	Strawberries - finishing up
Beets	Swiss Chard
Cilantro	Turnips
Collards	
Cucumbers	Forecast:
Dandelions	Blueberries - Mid to late June
Dill	Cabbage - 3rd week of June
Escarole & Endive	
Kale	
Leeks & Green Onions	
Lettuce	
Mint	
Parsley	



Black Sea Bass	Farm Raised Hard Clams & Oysters
Bluefish	Little-necks/Middle-necks
Butterfish	Specials
Flounder	Top-necks
Fluke	Cape May Salt Oysters
Ling	Delaware Bay Oysters
Lobster	
Mackerel	
Mahi-Mahi	
Monk-tail (Day Boat)	
Scup (Porgies)	
Sea Scallops (Day Boat)	
Skate Wings	
Squid	
Weakfish/Whiting	



Corn Preparation Tips for Maintaining Flavor

Bill Hlubik, Agricultural Agent, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Middlesex County

Every year, we cook over 500 ears of corn for our County Fair as part of our Jersey Fresh Taste Test and Survey. Based on the many comments that we receive, it's obvious that most people overcook sweet corn and because of overcooking, the corn loses a great deal of flavor.

Best techniques – Bring water to a rapid boil and immerse corn in boiling water for 3 to 5 minutes *at most*. Remove corn immediately, cool down as needed and consume ASAP. Consumers should buy only what they need for a day or two and refrigerate corn immediately. The quick removal of field heat slows down sugar to starch conversion. The super sweets hold their sweetness longer but many people also prefer varieties with more corn flavor and not so sugary taste.

For microwave – I've cooked corn right in the husk or wrapped husked ears in wax paper (if you're concerned about pesticide residue, remove some of the outermost leaves). Cooking time will depend on various microwaves and the number of ears cooked. I would advise experimenting with the lowest setting to provide adequate cooking without overcooking corn.

On the grill – Methods to maintain moistness are to soak ears in water and/or wrap in aluminum foil. Corn can be grilled in the husks; pull silks out first. Be careful to not overcook corn on the grill.

Freezing – Blanch on the cob, then cut off from cob and freeze. (A tip for minimizing mess while cutting kernels from cob – use a bundt pan. Stand cob in middle hole and sliced kernels will fall into the outer pan). During preparation for freezing it is important to keep surfaces and utensils clean.

Planting New Roots for the Uprooted

Elaine Barbour, Agricultural Assistant, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Passaic County

In June of 2007, six Rutgers Master Gardeners from Passaic County led an educational program for "Shelter Our Sisters" (SOS) in Wanaque, NJ. The shelter is a safe haven for women and children who have moved out of an abusive relationship and home situation.

SOS director Betsy Lenka requested help in growing vegetables on a small plot of land. The families wanted to grow vegetables to provide an opportunity for responsibility for the children and to improve their diet. Since the families might be in transit, container gardening was suggested since the potted plants could go with the family.

Large plastic pots, sterile potting mix and vegetable transplants were purchased by the Rutgers Master Gardener program and brought to the resident home in Wanaque. Children shoveled soil into the pots and planted the vegetable plants that they wanted to grow and eat. The pots were watered and placed in a sunny area. The Rutgers Master Gardeners supervised all activities. Growth habits and plant needs were explained to the program participants.

Rutgers Master Gardeners are visiting the site weekly to check on the plants and the families at the shelter. SOS is also the recipient of the Master Gardener Association of Passaic County's new food bank program. The extra food raised by Rutgers Master Gardeners is delivered weekly or bi-monthly to Shelter Our Sisters. Early rhubarb and a rhubarb pudding recipe was the first crop harvested and delivered.

This container project is a life-long skill that the shelter residents can take with them wherever they live. They can grow healthy food conveniently, easily and cheaply. The mothers and children will learn to care for plants and eat better. They know that there are people in the community that can help them to learn new skills and adopt new useful, productive habits so that they can rely upon themselves for gardening, good health and nutrition.

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