

How to grow: SWEETCORN

"A popular crop with gardeners and allotment growers alike, sweetcorn is easy to grow and its strong, ornamental structure helps protect other plants too. Sweetcorn makes a great addition to many recipes or can be enjoyed on its own either cooked or raw"

Essential Kit:

- 7cm Thermoformed Pots
- General Base Fertiliser
- 6ft Bamboo Canes
- High Nitrogen Liquid Fertiliser
- Bird Netting



ORGANIZING CROPS

If you really want to taste fresh sweetcorn then growing your own is the way to do it. It is an easy and low maintenance crop that is loved by the new and experienced gardener. For parents and grandparents out there it is a great introduction to veg growing for children.

Sweetcorn is best grown in a block formation as opposed to you planting it in rows. This is because sweetcorn relies on wind pollination so block planting will maximise your success. During summer the tall corn with its flower spikes and wispy silks can also make a great ornamental windbreak.

SOWING SWEETCORN

Young corn is not tolerant to frost making it best to sow under glass or a cloche three or four weeks before the last frost dates for your area. Using a 10cm pot filled with a general potting mix sow up to 8 seeds leaving 1.5cm between each seed.

Adding some perlite to the compost mix helps keep it light to make separating the seedlings easier. You can of course use a smaller pot sowing just two seeds per pot or cell, removing the weaker seedling later on.

Keep the composts moist as they grow on until they reach about 15cm tall. At this time you need to take time each day to harden them off against the outdoor temperatures. Do this by gradually increasing how long they are left outside each day over the period of a week.

PLANTING OUT

Sweetcorn thrives in fertile well drained soil so it is worthwhile using a nutrient rich fertiliser such as EX4 to prepare the beds. If you are sowing directly into the veg bed then sow two seeds per hole approximately 3-4cm deep and cover over. Again thin the weakest seedlings out to leave one strong plant. Use the same spacing

whether planting seedlings or sowing seed, which is 45cm between each plant and row. Gently tease apart potted seedlings and plant in a hole 12-15cm deep being careful to disturb the roots as little as possible.

Sweetcorn has shallow roots that grow very close to the soils surface and are often visible on mature plants. Make sure that when weeding between the plants it is done by hand to avoid the potential for root damage.

POLLINATING & HARVESTING THE COBS

One or two cobs per plant will start to form along the main stem in conjunction with the flower stalks at the very top. Long yellowy green tassels, known as silks, grow from the top of the corn cobs ready for pollination.

The long, grass like, flower stalks are full of pollen which is released in drifts in the breeze. The falling pollen then lands on the silks, with each silk in turn connected to a kernel on the cob. Poor pollination will result in gaps on the cob so on still days a gentle shake of each plant will help things along.

The plants themselves are quite strong so they shouldn't require staking, but you may want to take some precautions. A stake in each corner of the bed connected with twine will help give a little bit of extra stability.

The corn is ready to harvest about 6 weeks after the silks appear. At this point they will have turned a chocolate brown colour indicating it is ready to harvest. As a final check to see if it is ready peel away the outer sheath and use a fingernail to puncture a kernel.

ENDLESS CHOICE

Sweetcorn is a rewarding crop which has timeless popularity. If you if you haven't tried it before then I would certainly recommend taking the plunge and adding it to your beds or

borders. Remember if you are planting different cultivars then keep them apart as cross pollination can affect the flavour.

If stir fries are your thing then try 'Minipop F1'. The mini cobs, picked before the kernels swell, are delicious eaten raw or cooked. Sweetcorn 'Swift F1' are an extra early cultivar which produces sweet and tender cobs. The 'Moonshine F1' seed will produce 3-5 cobs per plant making it a heavy cropper, ideal for a hungry family.

If you really want something different then consider and early sowing of Heirloom Flint Corn Fiesta. It is a traditional Indian corn with kernels which are red, blue, purple, yellow, black and white.

A search online will reveal a wide variety to choose from to suit early, mid and late sowings as well as offer different sizes and flavours.

Need to know:



SOW:

April to June



PLANT:

May to June



HARVEST:

July to October



SPACING:

45cm



LOCATION:

Plant in full sun