

# Corn — Sweet Kernels Of Delight

BY JENNIFER GRAUE  
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The arrival of sweet corn season conjures memories of childhood summers — icy Popsicles, backyard barbecues, and bedtimes deferred. So it's no wonder we grow impatient each year waiting for the arrival of fresh local corn, when each succulent bite has the ability to transport us to a more carefree past.

Lucky for us we're in the height of the season. Equally lucky is that most of us understand that the negatives associated with mass-produced field corn — used for everything from food filler to ethanol fuel — have nothing to do with the traditional summer treat.

In fact, we're eating more fresh sweet corn now than we have in decades — about nine pounds per person last year, according to the USDA. One likely reason is our easy access to the corn at its finest, thanks to the growth in the number of farmers markets, which have tripled since 1994.

As Tom Nichol, manager of the San Jose Downtown Farmers Market points out, the fresher the better.

"The corn is picked hours before it hits the market," he explains. "That makes it special."

As soon as corn is picked, the sugars in it begin to turn to starch, so the less time the corn spends sitting around, the sweeter it is and the better it tastes. At Webb Ranch, a 90-year-old family farm that first took root on land leased from Stanford University back in the 1920s, corn is picked two to three times a day at the height of the season, to ensure the corn is at its very freshest when customers stop by.

Webb Ranch normally has corn by the fourth of July, but the cool, damp spring delayed harvest by a couple of weeks. Tom Hubbard, the farm's vice president of operations, says the farm uses organic seed, which doesn't have a protective coating, making it susceptible to mildew in soil that's too wet or cold.

But another reason we're eating more corn may be because it's just getting tastier. More varieties are grown these days, and there's been a dramatic move away from genetically modified — or GMO — corn, especially on farms like Webb Ranch and Brentwood's G&S Farms.

Glenn Stonebarger of G&S Farms devotes 700 acres to corn, and he sets aside some land each year to test hundreds of new varieties. Most of what Stonebarger plants is what he calls high eating-quality corn: hybrid, GMO-free varieties that boast high sugar content, tenderness and extended shelf life.

"I'm amazed at the quality that's evolved over the last 15 years," he says, "and how much better it's getting."

Hubbard agrees. His favorite is bicolor, a speckled corn with both yellow and white kernels. The very name of another variety, Ambrosia, gives some clue as to how sweet and heavenly it tastes. Webb Ranch also grows yellow varieties and some white corn to meet consumer demand, although Hubbard makes it clear he grows it somewhat reluctantly.

"White corn," he says, "is an invasion from the Midwest."

As for the best way to eat corn, it depends on the expert. Growers like Hubbard say raw, right out of the field is the only way to go. Stonebarger rarely eats corn at home during the



Here, red bell pepper and green onion provide a pop of color and a little added crunch to this recipe of Mexican corn salad.

season, because he gets his fill in the field.

"I take bites of corn every single morning," he says. "I eat two or three ears each day."

For those of us who buy it and take it home, there's a tendency to want to fuss with it.

Alison Abbors, the manager of Santa Cruz County, Calif.'s farmers markets, loves pairing it with black beans in a salad. Corn takes Tom Nichol, the San Jose market manager, back to his roots in the South. He likes it sauteed with okra and tomatoes. And Joey Altman, the San Francisco-based chef whose resume includes multiple James Beard Awards, Food Network stints, and guest judging gigs at the Brentwood Corn Festival, leans toward decadent cheesy corn fritters, and a tomato, basil, corn ragout that's sublime with grilled chicken or fish.

Or, you can go the simple route: grill it and serve it Mexican street-food style with a lime-spiked mayonnaise, cotija cheese and chile powder.

Perhaps the best way, though, is to boil it on the cob (no more than a minute), slather it with butter and pretend you're a kid again, letting the sweet juices and creamy butter run down your chin as you nibble an ear, moving like a typewriter, without ever coming up for air.

## CHOOSE YOUR EARS

These days you can find gorgeous corn at farmers markets and grocery stores, too. Here's how to choose:

Make sure you buy corn that's still in its husk.

The husk should be brightly colored and tight fitting.

Pull the husk away from the top and poke a kernel to see if it's juicy.

Wait to shuck the corn until you're ready to cook it.

Don't freak out if there's a worm at the top, which occasionally happens late in the season. Just cut that part of the cob off and take comfort in knowing that ear of corn was likely pesticide-free.



Althoff-Smith

Carrie Althoff and Tyler L. Smith were married May 29, 2010, at Christ the King Church in Omaha, NE, with Fr. Steven Stillmunks officiating.

Parents of the couple are Rick and Mary Althoff of Yankton, SD, and Whit Smith and Cindy Smith, both of Omaha, NE.

Maid of honor was Shaunti Althoff of Chicago, IL.

## CHEESY CORN FRITTERS

Makes 30-36

1 1/2 cups flour  
1/2 cup coarse cornmeal  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 cup sugar  
2 eggs, beaten  
1 teaspoon saffron threads  
soaked in 2 tablespoons water  
1 cup buttermilk  
1/2 cup grated cheddar cheese

1/4 cup butter, melted  
1 1/2 cups whole kernel corn  
Vegetable oil for deep frying  
Optional garnish: Truffle salt

1. Stir together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, salt and sugar.  
2. Combine the eggs, buttermilk and saffron. Fold in dry ingredients. Stir in the melted butter, cheese and finally the corn.  
3. Meanwhile, heat vegetable oil until very hot. Drop fritter mixture into the hot oil by tablespoons, being careful about splatter. Deep fry about 5 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm.  
—Joey Altman

## CREAMED CORN

Serves 6-8

8 ears sweet corn  
6 cups chicken broth  
3 tablespoons sugar  
1/2 cup half and half, warmed  
Salt, freshly ground white pepper to taste.

1. Shuck corn and cut kernels off the cobs. Reserve cobs and set aside.

2. Pour broth into a large pot and bring it to a boil. Reduce heat, add cobs, cover and simmer for 20 minutes to flavor the broth. Remove cobs and discard.

3. Add corn kernels and sugar to the broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, partially cover and simmer until corn is very tender, 15-20 minutes. Remove one cup of corn from broth with a slotted spoon and set aside.

4. Puree the remaining corn and broth in a blender or food processor until nearly smooth. Transfer the puree to a serving bowl, add whole reserved kernels and the half and half. Season with salt and white pep-

per. Serve piping hot.

—Sheila Lukins, "U.S.A. Cookbook" (Workman Publishing, 1997)

## CORN AND BLACK BEAN SALSA

Makes about 3 cups

2 ears corn  
1 cup black beans  
1 medium tomato, seeded and diced  
1/4 medium red onion, finely diced

1 jalapeno, seeds and veins removed, finely diced  
2 tablespoons of chopped fresh cilantro  
2 tablespoons of lime juice  
2 teaspoons olive oil  
1/2 teaspoon cumin  
Salt to taste

Boil corn for 1 minute and cool under running water. Cut off kernels and place in a bowl with remaining ingredients. Stir until thoroughly mixed. Serve this hearty salsa at room temperature or chilled.  
—Marge Poore, "1000 Mexican Recipes" (Wiley 2001)

## MEXICAN CORN SALAD

Serves 4-6

This is an adaptation of elotes, the popular Mexican street food that features grilled corn on the cob, brushed with lime-spiked mayonnaise and garnished with chili powder and cotija cheese. When the kernels are off the cob, the mixture is called esquites. Here, red bell

pepper and green onion provide a pop of color and a little added crunch.

4 ears of corn, boiled for 1 minute and cooled  
1/2 red bell pepper, finely chopped  
2 small green onions, chopped (both white and green parts)  
1/4 cup mayonnaise  
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice  
1/2 teaspoon or more chili powder

1/4 cup crumbled cotija or Parmesan cheese  
Cut kernels from cobs and place in a bowl with diced red pepper and green onions. Add mayonnaise, lime juice and chili powder and toss with vegetables. Stir in cheese and serve at room temperature, or chill for 2 to 4 hours before serving.  
—Jennifer Graue

per. Serve piping hot.

—Marge Poore, "1000 Mexican Recipes" (Wiley 2001)

## GRILLED CORN WITH TEQUILA-LIME BUTTER

Serves 8

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, softened to room temperature  
3/4 teaspoon minced, seeded jalapeno  
1 teaspoon finely grated lime zest (about 4 Mexican limes)  
1 teaspoon lime juice (about 1 Mexican lime)  
1 teaspoon tequila  
1 tablespoon minced cilantro

1/2 teaspoon salt  
8 unshucked ears corn  
1. Make the tequila-lime butter by beating the butter, jalapeno and lime zest in a bowl until creamy. Beat in the lime juice and tequila. The mixture should be very soft, but there should be no liquid showing; if you want, add a little more tequila. Beat in the cilantro and salt. Taste and adjust the seasoning. The flavor should be very strong (it will be much milder when spread over the corn), but it should be evenly balanced between lime, butter and salt. Add more salt, lime or tequila as needed.

2. Spoon the butter onto a sheet of plastic wrap, form it into a log and roll it into a cylinder. Twist the ends of the plastic wrap in opposite directions to firm the cylinder and roll it gently on the counter to eliminate any air pockets in the center. Refrigerate until ready to use. (Recipe can be prepared to this point a couple of days in advance).

3. Soak the ears of corn in enough water to cover for at least 30 minutes before grilling.

4. Grill the corn over a medium-hot fire until the kernels inside are golden and tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove the husks and most of the silk will come with them; rub off what little might remain. Slice the butter into discs and pass alongside the hot corn.  
—Russ Parsons, Los Angeles Times

## SAUTEED SALMON WITH A WARM SALAD OF CORN AND HEIRLOOM TOMATOES

Serves 4

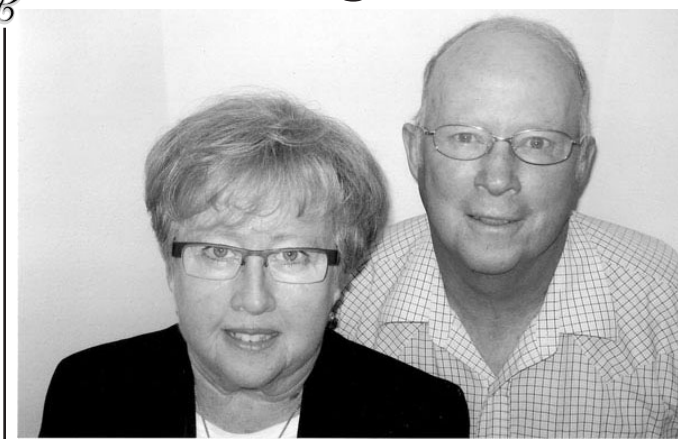
4 salmon fillets, without skin  
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil, divided  
4 ears of corn, shucked and cut from the cob  
1/4 cup minced shallots  
1 jalapeno, seeded and minced  
2 green onions, chopped  
2 pounds heirloom tomatoes  
1/2 cup basil leaves, torn into small pieces  
Juice of 1 lemon  
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Heat a grill pan on medium high heat. Lightly oil the salmon and season with salt and pepper. Place salmon on heated pan and grill to desired doneness, about 5 minutes for medium.

2. Meanwhile, heat a saute pan over medium high heat. Place a few tablespoons of oil in the pan, then add the corn, shallots, jalapenos and green onions and cook for 1 minute. Add the tomatoes and cook for an additional minute.

3. Transfer the saute pan ingredients to a mixing bowl and add the basil, lemon juice and remaining oil. Toss and season to taste. Divide among four plates and place a grilled piece of salmon on top.  
—Joey Altman

## Celebrating 50 Years

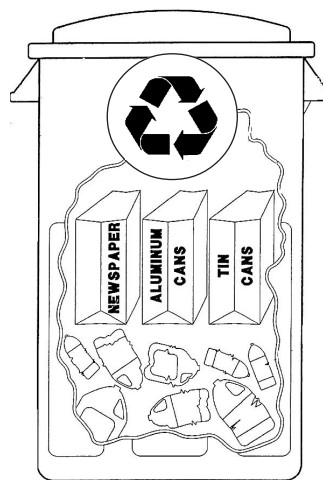


We would like to announce our parent's 50th wedding anniversary. Bill and Judy Knutson of Centerville, SD, were married on August 6, 1960. We wish them 50 more years of wedded bliss.

Todd (Lori) Knutson of Utica, SD;  
Teresa (Marty) Gilbertson of Vermillion, SD; and  
Janine (Jeff) Nielsen of Canistota, SD

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