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Plants on Your Plate

Corn

Sweet corn is one of the most popular summer vegetable crops to grow on both sides of the state line. Whether cooked in a pot of boiling water or grilled alongside the burgers, corn on the cob is often considered a staple item in the all American summer barbeque. Corn is also a misunderstood vegetable, often accused of being nutritionally void.

While corn can't claim 'superfood' status the way that kale does, sweet corn contributes vitamin C and many B vitamins, including folate, as well as magnesium and potassium. Folate is important for women of childbearing age to reduce the risk of neural tube disorders, while potassium helps maintain healthy blood pressure and magnesium helps to build and maintain strong bones. Sweet corn is also a rich source of both soluble and insoluble fiber, which aids in controlling cholesterol as well as digestive health and bowel regularity. The fiber also acts as a prebiotic, feeding and fueling the growth of beneficial gut bacteria. Yellow corn also contains the phytochemicals lutein and zeaxanthin, which protect vision and guards against cataracts and macular degeneration.

A common misconception regarding sweet corn, is that most of it is genetically modified. Though there is GMO sweet corn seed available, it makes up only about 10 - 15% of the sweet corn in the marketplace nationwide. There are numerous hybrid

varieties of sweet corn with varying degrees of sweetness and keeping quality. The majority of field corn grown in the US is genetically modified and is primarily used for animal feed, bio-fuel or processed into food products like corn oil, cereal, cornstarch or high fructose corn syrup. If you want to avoid GMO products, choose organic, as the USDA does not permit genetic engineering in USDA certified organic products.

There is often confusion regarding where corn belongs in the MyPlate food guide. Sweet corn, like our beloved corn on the cob, belongs in the vegetable group. Dent corn, a high starch variety of field corn commonly ground into corn meal, belongs in the grain group. In its whole grain form, dent corn (or even popcorn for that matter) is composed of the outer bran layer (that contains fiber), the inner nutrient rich germ (that can sprout and grow a new plant) and the starchy endosperm, that makes up the bulk of the cornmeal or flour. When corn goes through the milling process to remove the bran and germ, it becomes a refined grain. Growing up on the farm, I can remember trying to pick field corn early to eat it on the cob, but trust me, it's just not the same!

To enjoy sweet corn later in the year, you can cut it off the cob to can or freeze, or even freeze it on the cob. Find details at the Seasonal and Simple website <https://seasonalandsimple.info/> or in the free app for Android or iOS.

While you are enjoying your next round of sweet corn, grill some extra to use in this tasty salad that makes for a perfect light, yet filling summer main dish.

Grilled Corn and Black Bean Salad

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup low sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 1/2 cup couscous (uncooked)
- 2 medium sized ears of corn, unhusked
- 1 can black beans, low-sodium (drained and rinsed)
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- 1/2 medium sized onion, chopped
- 1/2 red or green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
1/2 teaspoon cumin, ground
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, optional
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper

Directions

1. Wash and chop all produce, set aside.
2. Soak unhusked corn in water for 5 minutes. Grill over hot coals or gas grill for 15-20 minutes, turning every 5 minutes. Remove from heat, place in large pan and cover for 5 minutes. Cut corn from cob (hint: set corn cob in the center of a bundt pan and cut corn into pan.)
3. Bring broth to a boil in a small pot, and stir in couscous. Cover the pot, and remove it from the heat. Let stand for 5 minutes.
4. In a large bowl, whisk together oil, vinegar, cumin, and lime juice.
5. Add beans, tomato, onion, bell pepper, and corn to the vinegar and oil mixture, and toss.
6. Fluff the couscous well with a fork, breaking up any chunks. Add to beans and vegetables, and mix well.
7. Add cilantro, salt and black pepper if desired.
8. Chill for 30 minutes before serving. Eat leftovers within 3 to 5 days.

Variation: Try quinoa instead of couscous. For a little extra kick, add a finely chopped jalapeno pepper.

Makes 8 servings

Calories: 133, Total Fat: 3 g, Saturated Fat: 0 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 80mg, Total Carbohydrate: 22 g, Dietary Fiber: 5 g, Total Sugars: 1 g, Added Sugar: 0g
Protein: 5 g

Recipe from USDA Mixing Bowl



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