

Basic Survival Food From Your Garden: Corn

Corn has a bad reputation today. Besides being genetically modified, corn today has been transformed into high-fructose corn syrup. It's creeping into all kinds of foods and beverages where it never belonged.

The modern agriculture movement has taken this important crop and turned it into something to be avoided. The soil becomes so depleted it needs tons of fertilizer to continue producing. It's been eroded, and completely disturbed. But a quick look at history will show that our ancestors depended on this staple crop.

It's a calorie-dense food that's fed countless people and animals throughout time. It grows six out of the seven continents, making it an ideal survival food in [almost every climate](#).

Corn is a great addition to a survival garden. It's fairly easy to grow, and is easier to harvest than other grains. There's no need to thresh the corn crop after all.

Types of Corn

You just need to pick the right variety of corn. There are six main categories, but I'm going to focus on only three, sweet corn, field or dent corn, and popcorn. The other main types are flint corn, ornamental corn, and flour corn. Since these types have different uses, you'll want to be sure and grow the kind or kinds that you need.

Sweet Corn

Harvested when the kernels are in the milky stage, sweet corn is what you find in the grocery store on the cob. It's sweet,

tender, and flavorful. Many gardeners plant varieties of sweet corn in their home garden.

Field (Dent) Corn

Field corn isn't as sweet as sweet corn, but it has a multitude of uses. It's used as animal feed, ground and turned into cornmeal, or prepared as grits. It's perfect crop to grow for survival.

Before harvesting, field corn is allowed to dry a bit while still on the stalk. As the moisture leaves each kernel, a little dent appears.

Popcorn

If you have space to grow an extra variety of corn, consider popcorn. The kernels pop up fluffy and provide a nice snack.

After you've harvested your popcorn ears, you'll have to dry out the kernels even more. Some growers prefer an oven, others

let the sun do the job.

GROWING A CORN CROP

KEEPING IT REAL

average number of acres per farmer
1,046 (56% planted in corn)

average age of a U.S. farmer: 56 years old

IT'S IN OUR ROOTS

95% of all corn farms in America are FAMILY OWNED.

a farmer has to be an optimist or he still wouldn't be a farmer. -will rogers



Average Corn Yield: 164 bushels per acre
Average price = \$5.06/bushel

AFTER RISKING \$419,990 THAT FARMER EXPECTS TO RECEIVE \$68,018 ON HIS CORN CROP.

BUT THERE ARE VARIABLES... WHAT IF THE CROP SUFFERS?

drought
disease
flooding
wind

expected yield
actual yield

...AND EXTRA EXPENSES BECAUSE FARMERS ARE SELF-EMPLOYED

asset insurance ~\$4,300/yr
life insurance ~\$2,500/yr
15.3% social security tax
health insurance ~\$18,000/yr

PLUS RISING INPUT COSTS
which have nearly **DOUBLED** since 2005

why they farm:

FAR AND AWAY, the BEST PRIZE that life has to offer is the chance to WORK HARD at work worth doing.

—THOMAS HEDDERLEY

CREATED BY ERIN EHNLE/KEEPING IT REAL, THROUGH THE LENS OF A FARM GIRL
SOURCES: ILLINOIS FARM BUSINESS, FARM MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

How to Grow Corn

No matter which variety of corn you decide to plant, make sure you find [seeds](#) that are open pollinated, heirloom varieties. These seeds haven't been genetically modified, and they have a historical track record of helping nations survive.

If you plant more than one variety of corn, be sure to leave some space between them. At least 500 feet is recommended. Otherwise the different types of corn will cross pollinate and that can affect how each one tastes and grows.

Corn has a reputation of being a fairly needy crop. If you plant heirloom seeds, you won't need to water it nearly as much as today's popular varieties. After all, it survived all those years before irrigation was readily available. [Mulch](#) will help keep water in your soil.

However, this crop does require a lot of nitrogen. It's known as a heavy feeder plant. In days past, each seed was planted on top of a dead fish. As the fish decomposed, it supplied the growing corn with the extra nitrogen it needed.

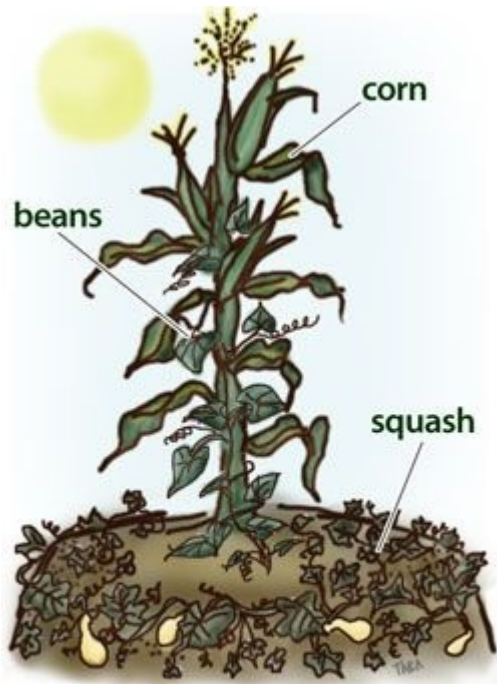
If fish aren't in abundance where you live, you can also use compost and blood meal. You'll want to give the soil an initial boost before planting. Once the corn reaches knee high, you'll want to give it some more.

Corn thrives in soil that drains well. You should pick a location with full sun. You'll want to know the length of your growing season, and plant a variety that does well.

Where I live, the growing season is on the short end. We often have killing frosts until Memorial Day or even a little past then. The locals recommend starting seed indoors and transplanting it to the soil in June. The saying here is that you want your corn, "knee high by the 4th of July," but check with others in your area to learn what works best where you

are.

Rotate Your Crops



*Direct-Sow, Easy-to-Grow:
The Ancient **Three Sisters** Method*

source: Old Farmer's Almanac

Because corn pulls many nutrients out of the soil, it's important to rotate your crops each year.

Many people plant a cover crop after corn, to help improve the soil.

Harvesting Your Corn

Sweet corn is ready to harvest when the tassel begins turning dark brown. You'll want to open up an ear and check to make sure the kernels are milky. You also want to make sure the kernels are well developed and plump.

If the liquid from the kernels is watery, it's too early to harvest. Let them continue to develop and test again later.

Field corn and popcorn need to be left on the stalks longer. They'll begin the drying process before you harvest them.

To pick corn, twist the ear gently towards the ground. It'll

break off. Sweet corn is best picked on the day you're planning on eating or preserving it. That'll keep the flavor the best.

Preserving Your Corn

Once you've picked your corn, it's time to eat it or preserve your harvest. You'll need to shuck your corn, removing the silk and husks. But hang onto at least some of these—we'll cover their benefits in a later section.

You can [stockpile](#) sweet corn in a couple of ways. You can [dry it](#), freeze it, or can it. There are pros and cons to each method, but drying and canning are probably better for survival purposes. You might not always have electricity to run your freezer.

Field corn and popcorn are dried and stored either on the cob or as kernels. When you're ready to cook field corn into cornbread, you'll need to grind it into flour first. Be sure your [grain mill](#) can handle corn.

If you'll be feeding corn to your critters, you can store it on the cob in a corn crib. The slats on this structure ensure that air can circulate around the cobs. This will keep them from molding.

Using Corn

Now that you have yourself some corn, what can you do with it? Corn can be used in recipes, to improve your health, and around the homestead. It's a versatile crop.

As Food

Since corn stores so well, it's an ideal addition to your food stockpiles. Once you've dried some kernels, you can easily roast it and turn it into parched corn. These original corn nuts will be handy to take on the road.

Cornmeal mush is another way to use your corn. Mix 2 cups of corn meal with 2 cups of cold water. Bring 6 cups of water to a boil, and carefully add the cornmeal mixture. After it returns to a boil, reduce the heat and let it simmer while you stir occasionally. It'll take about ten minutes to thicken up.

Whole kernel corn is a popular ingredient in salsa. You can combine your corn with other produce from your garden to create a delicious dip.

You can pop your popcorn in a pan with a little oil. Put a tablespoon of oil in a cold pan, and add enough popcorn to evenly cover the bottom of the pan. You don't want to add too many kernels or it'll burn. Cover your pan, turn on your burner, and slowly heat the pan.

You'll want to shake fairly frequently. This will prevent any from sticking and burning. When the popping slows, remove the pan from the heat. Let it sit for a minute or two in case any additional kernels pop. Serve with butter, salt, and any of your favorite seasonings.

Corn used in plenty of other recipes as well or you can [turn it into flour](#) or [use it to feed your chickens](#). You can even use corn husks to wrap tamales in. Take time now to try some recipes and see what you and your family enjoy eating. That way survival foods won't come as a shock to their system.

As Medicine

Corn silk tea has historically been used as a diuretic. It's used to treat bladder and kidney ailments. You'll want to finely chop your clean corn silk. Then, steep a tablespoon of this in a cup of hot water for ten or fifteen minutes. Strain out the silk before drinking.

In addition to its diuretic benefits, corn silk tea helps the body release extra fluid. It's a gentle detoxifying agent.

Corn silk can also be used topically. It has some antiseptic effects, which helps promote wound healing.

Cornstarch

Diaper Rash – to soothe, powder their bottoms with cornstarch after each diaper change. To protect, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cornstarch to their bathwater.

Sunburn – to soothe, mix 1 cup cornstarch into warm bath water. Soak for 20-30 minutes.

Burns – to soothe, mix 1 tablespoon cornstarch and 1 tablespoon baking soda in 8 cups warm water. Dip a soft cloth or gauze into the mixture and place on skin. Allow it to remain on burn for 20-30 minutes.

Face – to control oil, dust your face with a small amount of cornstarch.

Face – to clean, heat 2 tablespoons cornstarch, 2 tablespoons glycerin and $\frac{1}{8}$ cup water in a double boiler. Heat until the mixture is thick and clear. Use in place of soap.

Face – for a facial, mix together $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cornstarch, 2 tablespoons milk and 1 egg white until smooth. Apply mixture to face and allow it to dry for 15-20 minutes. Rinse.

Hair – to clean hair between shampooing, sprinkle hair with cornstarch to absorb oil. Brush hair to remove cornstarch.

Powder – to make a scented body powder, fill a container with cornstarch and add a few drops of your favorite scented oil. Shake well to mix.

Skin – to relieve irritations from bug bites, poison ivy and rashes, make a thick paste using cornstarch and water. Apply to affected area.

Skin – to prevent chaffing, dust area with cornstarch.

Underarms – to eliminate odor, rub underarms with rubbing alcohol then dust with cornstarch.

Feet – to reduce itching from athlete's foot, sprinkle cornstarch in your shoes and on your feet.

• [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

Around the Homestead

Corn has been used as animal feed throughout history. If you're looking for an inexpensive way to [feed chickens](#) or [raise hogs](#), corn can help. Typically, you'd crack the corn

through a grain mill once before feeding. The act of cracking the corn helps the animals to break it down better.

Saving Seed for Future Harvests

It's important to [save some of your crop each year to plant](#) the following year. Not having to purchase seeds every year will help you become more self-sufficient. Saving corn seed is fairly simple.

You want to harvest your ears after the husks become dry. Then, you need to ensure the kernels are thoroughly dry. You can hang the ear upside down to help dry it out evenly.

Once dried, shell your corn. These seeds should be stored in a cool, dry location. They will remain viable for several years if properly stored.

Final Thoughts on Corn

Corn that hasn't been [genetically modified](#) is a survival crop utilized throughout history. It's beneficial as a food, for its medicinal purposes, and for feeding your animals.

Are you currently growing this essential crop? What varieties grow best in your neck of the woods? Please share your corn tips and tricks in the comment section, and click on the banner below to find out more survival secrets from our ancestors!



**The 3 Pioneer Survival
Lessons We Should All Learn**

[Watch Video »](#)

*This article has been written by **Lisa Tanner** for [Survivopedia](#).*