



CORN TALKING POINTS

2. A Kernel of Corn History

- Ears of corn have been found in caves in Mexico that date back seven to eight thousand years.
- By the time Christopher Columbus reached the New World, corn grew from Southern Canada to the Andes Mountains in South America.
 - Talk about other fruits or vegetables that you have discussed that Columbus brought with him to the Americas, this is different in that corn was already growing in the Americas before he sailed to the new land. That he played a role in taking corn back to Europe and from there it spread.
- The Native Americans gave corn to Christopher Columbus, who brought it back to Spain. Once in Europe, corn spread quickly throughout the world.
- The Indians taught American settlers how to cultivate corn and use the alkali from wood ash to turn it into hominy. The hominy was cooked, broken into grits, or ground into meal for making porridge, cake, and bread.
- The Mojave Indians of Colorado and California were farmers who grew and harvested corn.
- The corn we eat today was not developed until the 1700s. We eat sweet corn now, but the Native Americans would eat what we call field corn. They would let the kernels dry on the stalk then pick the corn once it was hard so that it could be ground. Sweet corn is picked when the kernels are soft and plant is still green.



3. How does Corn Grow?

- Corn is planted one to two inches into the soil. The seed grows best when the soil is warm.
- The seed sends down a taproot that will brace the tall stalk. Then little green leaves begin to form, that look like grass.
- As time goes on the stalk of the corn begins to grow and get taller. The roots of the plant will grow down three to five feet to support the tall stalk. Some roots start above the ground and help support the stalk as well.
- The corn plant is pollinated by the wind. The tassels at the top of the stalk pollinate each stand of silk, and each silk stand will become one kernel of corn.
- However, if not all the silk stands are pollinated due to wrong weather conditions or other mishaps the ears of corn will not be full of kernels.
- Each stalk of corn usually has one to two ears of corn, but some varieties have more.
- After the corn is pollinated it takes about three weeks before the corn can be harvested. The weather plays a large role in the timing of harvest, if the temperature is too low and there is not much water, the corn will take longer to mature.

- For sweet corn varieties that you eat, the corn has to be picked just right. The kernels fill with “milk”, a sweet liquid, harvesting needs to take place during this time so that the corn is sweetest.
- Corn is an annual member of the grass family Poaceae and of the Monocot group. This plant has “ears” with kernels of varying colors.
- **Corn is considered a grain, vegetable, and fruit.** When corn is harvested before maturity while the kernels are soft, it is considered a vegetable. Corn harvested at maturity is considered a grain. Each kernel of corn on a cob is a whole fruit. The corn kernel is botanically a type of fruit called *caryopsis*, which is a fruit with a single seed.
- The Poaceae family is an important food crop consisting of the cereal grains such as corn, wheat, oats, barley, and rice. Corn is one of the highest producing cereal crops
- Sweet corn, known for its higher sugar content, is eaten fresh, frozen, and canned. Yellow and white corn is a hybrid created from heirloom varieties, such as multicolored corn. Nearly all sweet corn (98%) has been cross-pollinated for color, more starch, and larger ears and kernels. Sweet corn has three colors: yellow, white, and bi-color. The bi-color variety consists of 80% yellow and 20% white corn.



4. What season do we pick Corn?

- The peak seasons for corn harvesting takes place from May through July in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Texas, Washington, and California.
- In the Midwest most of the corn grown is field corn. There is sweet corn grown though, and it is harvested in August and early September.

5. Why should we eat Corn?

- A ½ cup of white or yellow corn provides:
 - A good source of folate and thiamin, also known as vitamin B1.*
 - A source of many other vitamins, including vitamin C and pyridoxine, also known as vitamin B6.
 - A source of fiber, manganese, phosphorus, magnesium, niacin, and potassium.
- Champion sources of thiamin:
 - Beans (black, lima, navy, pinto, soy)
 - Corn (white and yellow)
 - Fortified breakfast cereals
 - Pasta and rice
 - Whole grain products

What is Thiamin?

Thiamin, also known as Vitamin B1, is a water-soluble vitamin.

The body requires thiamin to form adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which is used to produce energy in every cell of the body.

Within the body, thiamin is found in the skeletal muscles, heart, liver, kidneys, and brain.

Thiamin is also essential for the proper functioning of nerve cells.

Healthy Serving Ideas

Add corn to your favorite salad recipes using fresh, frozen, or canned corn.

Stuff corn and black beans into whole wheat pita pockets for a healthy sandwich.
Sprinkle corn kernels on pizza for a new take on toppings.
Add frozen or canned corn to your favorite casserole or soup.

6. How do you pick good Corn?

Choose fresh, green husks and ears that are covered with plump, shiny kernels.
Avoid silks that show signs of rot or decay.
Store fresh corn in a cool location or in the refrigerator for up to three days.
Keep a bag of corn in the freezer for last minute meal ideas.
When buying canned corn, look for low-sodium varieties.

How Much Do I Need?

- A ½ cup of corn is about one small ear of corn. This is about the same as one cupped handful of corn kernels.
- A ½ cup of corn provides a good source of folate and thiamin.
- Thiamin is also called vitamin B₁. It helps your body use energy.

Home Grown Facts

- The United States is the world's leading producer of sweet corn, accounting for about 46% of the world's corn production between 2002 and 2004.
- California is the nation's top producer of sweet corn.
- Sweet corn is one of a few crops grown in all 50 states.

Just the Facts

The average ear of corn has 800 kernels in 16 rows.
Corn is grown on every continent of the world with the exception of Antarctica.
Most of the corn grown in the United States is used to feed cattle, hogs, sheep, and poultry.
Corn is used in processed foods and industrial products, such as cornstarch and plastics.

Idea: Maybe for an after school program have an area farmer brought in as a guest speaker talking about how corn is planted, harvested and what products can be made from it.