

## Sweetcorn

Cultural Details: ZZ609

Sweetcorn is a fairly problem free crop. It will grow on most free draining, moisture retentive soils, but hates heavy clay soils as it produces deep roots.

There are 4 main classifications for sweetcorn varieties:

- Normal Sugar:** These varieties show standard sweetcorn performance and flavour.
- Sugar Enhanced:** These varieties are sweeter than the standard varieties, with kernels that are tenderer, with a longer shelf life.
- Super Sweet:** These have a higher level of complex sugars that have a slower conversion to starch which means they have a longer shelf life than standard sweetcorn
- Xtra Tender:** These are a new development in sweetcorn breeding that produce grains with a tender pericarp, combined with a very sweet taste.

### Sowing & Growing

Sow Sweetcorn in the greenhouse at a temperature of 20-27°C into peat pots as they do not like to have their roots disturbed. Seed can be sown outdoors but the soil needs to be at least 10°C, this can be achieved by using cloches or a clear plastic film to pre warm the soil before sowing in mid April.

Seed takes 10-12 days to germinate and once seedlings reach 8cm tall they can be planted out. Unlike most vegetable Sweetcorn is better planted in blocks rather than rows, as this promotes successful pollination of the female flowers which produce cobs. Poor pollination can lead to missing kernels in cob rows. An ideal spacing for a block of sweetcorn is 45cm x 45cm.

Once established keep the bed weed free, and feed fortnightly with a feed recommended for tomatoes. Earthing up around the stems will encourage supporting roots essential for crops grown in windy locations. Water in periods of dry weather, this is especially important at the time of flowering.

A single sowing of early, mid and late varieties can give a longer harvest period extending the harvest by 2-3 weeks. Sweetcorn takes on average 14-16 weeks from sowing to harvest.

To encourage pollination of the silks, female flowers, tapping the tassels or male flowers, helps pollen to fall and pollinate flowers to produce cobs. It is advised to grow super sweet varieties separately from standard sweetcorn as cross pollination can cause a reduction in taste of the super sweet varieties.

During the development of the plants side shoots or 'tillers' often appear. These are not harmful to crop production and will not reduce the yield of cobs, removing such tillers may actually damage the plant rather than helpful.

## **Harvest**

A good guide to the ripeness of the cobs is the shrivelling browning of the silks at the end of the cob. Squeezing kernels is a good test to how ripe the cobs are, a watery liquid suggest unripe, milky liquid ripe to harvest, thick dough like substance the cobs have gone over and past it. Twisting the cobs off the plant close to eating time will ensure great tasting sweet cobs.

*Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.*