

Seasonal Eating
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Summer's Redemption: Sweet Corn
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I must admit that summer is not my favorite time of the year. It's hot and dry and I feel more cooped up than in the winter. But if there is one redeeming factor for summer it is when the sweet corn hits its peak. The pop of the kernels in your mouth and the burst of sweetness and juice are just plain hard to beat. Even non-vegetable lovers and children like corn.

Roasting corn on the cob on the grill is one of my favorite ways to cook it. Almost 15 years ago when I started my job here I went to the Tennessee State Fair. Everyone said to get the roasted ear of corn – this is not what I thought of as “fair food”. I usually think of corndogs or gyros. But they were right. The roasted corn with its slightly brown/black kernels was fabulous and became my State Fair staple each year. You can also remove the kernels and make a roasted corn salsa or sauté some peppers and onions, splash it with cream, sprinkle a little seasoned salt and add the roasted corn kernels for a tasty side dish.



Corn salads are another great use of fresh corn where it is just blanched in boiling water for about 3 minutes to remove the starchy taste and then cooled and cut from the cob (if you're not using roasted corn). Combined with tomatoes, peppers, scallions, black beans or any other assortment of vegetables and tossed with a vinaigrette dressing, it makes for a great summer picnic dish. We held a School of Gourmet Arts class in June focusing on picnic foods and one of my favorite dishes from the class was a corn salad. Tomatoes, basil, red onion and corn combine in a bath of cider vinegar vinaigrette. The recipe is below for you to try.

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Always remember that the natural sugars in the corn start turning to starch as soon as it is picked. So try to buy your corn or harvest it from the garden the day you will use it. Look for green husks and yellow silks for freshness. The kernels should be plump, not shriveled and the rows should be tight. Corn in the husk is usually fresher and better than the pre-shucked versions. Just use a soft brush to remove the silks. When boiling corn on the cob, you can add a little sugar to the boiling water if your corn is not just picked from the garden. Adding salt to the water can toughen the skins so save the salt until after cooking. The microwave works well by wrapping the ears in waxed paper to cook.

The easiest way to remove the kernels and not have them flying all over the kitchen is to use a Bundt pan. Place the stem end of the corn so it is resting in the center hole of the pan. Holding the ear upright with one hand, run a chef's knife down the side of the ear, cutting the kernels off and letting them fall into the pan. Leave about a ¼" of the kernel on the cob to prevent getting the tough fibers of the cob in the corn. Rotate the ear or turn the pan and continue around the ear until all of the kernels are off. If you want creamed corn, scrape the cob with the back of the knife to remove the rest of the solids and juices or "milk" of the corn.

For more ideas on using corn and other August produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website Seasonal Eating page. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstrations will resume on Wednesday, August 17 at 12:00 noon at the UT Extension Office. Call the office at 684-5971 for more information or to sign up by August 15th and bring \$5.00 to class to cover the samples.

Fresh Corn Salad

- 5 ears fresh corn, shucked
- 10-15 cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered if large
- 1/2 medium red onion, chopped
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 6 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil

In a large pot of boiling water, cook the corn for 3 minutes or just until the starchiness is gone. Drain and immerse the corn in ice water to stop the cooking and to set the color. When the corn is cool, cut the kernels off the cob. Toss the kernels in a large bowl with tomatoes and onions. In a small bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper. Pour over corn mixture and toss. Chill until ready to eat, stir in basil just before serving. Can serve chilled or bring to room temperature.