

MOLES SEEDS

Sweetcorn

Cultural Leaflet: ZZ609

This is a versatile, popular crop for fresh market sales, P.Y.O., prepack and processing. Works very well as a roadside sales item. Sweetcorn is also suitable for use as young plant sales for the home gardener. 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.

For retail plant sales, sow the seeds directly into cell packs for sale as small plants once the danger of frost has passed. Sowing to sale is around three weeks.

There are five main classifications for sweetcorn varieties:

(1) Normal Sugar (su)

These varieties show standard sweetcorn performance and flavour.

(2) Sugar Enhanced (se)

These varieties are sweeter than the standard varieties, with kernels that more tender, with a longer shelf life.

(3) Super Sweet (sh2)

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

(4) Xtra Tender (sh2)

These are a new development in sweetcorn breeding that produce grains with a tender pericarp, combined with a very sweet taste.

(5) SuperSeedWare® (sh2)

These are a naturally developed gene type that dramatically improves the performance of the seed, especially with earlier sowings into wetter or colder soil. Other benefits include stronger, more uniform growth and enhanced flavour.

Note: sh2 varieties should be grown separately from other types to avoid cross pollination, which can cause a reduction in quality and flavour.

None of our sweetcorn varieties are genetically modified.

Propagation and Growing-on

For field scale production, sow April to June, spacing 20-30cm x 75-95cm, drilling rate 45,000 - 65,000 per hectare (18,000 -26,000 per acre). Drill to a depth of 4cm, so the plant is less likely to fall / get blown over. Some varieties do stand better than others and the bigger the area grown the better they stand.

For smaller scale propagation, 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.

Seeds take 10-12 days to germinate and once seedlings reach no more than 4cm tall they can be planted out. Unlike most vegetables, 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.

We recommend the use of a high nitrogen top dressing programme. Sweetcorn needs more nitrogen than almost all other vegetable crops right up until harvest to get the best corn.

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.

(12/15)

