

Sweet corn just gets sweeter

By LEE REICHL
AP NEWSFEATURES

The good 'ol days seemed to have snowier winters, greener grass, and more toothsome apples. Perhaps it was so. One thing those good 'ol' days definitely did not have was sweeter sweet corn.

Only recently have plant breeders found new genes that shoot the sugar content of sweet corn sky-high.

Papoon corn, the first recorded variety of sweet corn, probably originated as a chance mutation of a single gene of field corn. That gene, the so-called sugary gene (abbreviated su), brought the sugar level in corn seed from 4 percent up to 10 percent.

We gardeners have tried to make the most of that 10 percent ever since the time when 18th century Plymouth, Mass., gardeners grew Papoon corn. We pick an ear just when each kernel is creamy and as sweet as can be.

Since sugars in corn start changing to starch as soon as the ear is picked, we eat the corn right out in the garden or else rush it to the kitchen to a pot of already boiling water. In only one day, half that sugar will turn to starch.

Sweetness in sweet corn took a quantum leap a few decades ago as a result of two genes. The first gene, called the shrunken-2 gene (abbreviated sh2) because of the way the dried kernels shrivel up, pushes the sugar level in corn up to a whopping 37 percent. Not

■ Papoon corn, the first recorded variety of sweet corn, probably originated as a chance mutation of a single gene of field corn.

only that, but even two days after picking that corn still has 29 percent sugar. The variety Illini Xtra Sweet was the first of the appropriately named "super-sweet" or "extrasweet" sweet corns. Other varieties with this gene are Early Xtra Sweet, Starstruck, and How Sweet It Is.

The second gene responsible for sweeter sweet corn is the sugar enhanced gene (abbreviated se). The se gene is effective only in combination with the su gene of regular sweet corn varieties, and the combination of the two genes results in varying degrees of sweetness.

Still no need to scurry to the kitchen with so varieties, because they also retain their sweetness for a long time. Kandy Korn EH, Pearls 'n Gold EH, Silverado and Snow Queen EH are varieties with the se gene. Many of these varieties have that "EH," which stands for "everlasting heritage," in their names.

Despite the sugary sweetness in these new sweet corns, they are not for every-

one. First of all, these new varieties need special care. The seeds are finicky, and will not just as soon as grow if planted in soils that are too cool, too dry, or too wet. Seems like soil micro-organisms also enjoy that extra sweetness. And even after the seeds have been coaxed to germinate, the resulting seedlings often lack vigor.

The sweeter sweet corns can lose almost all their sweetness if the wrong pollen blows onto their silks. If an sh2 variety is cross-pollinated with a standard sweet corn, kernels on both will taste dry and starchy like those of field corn.

Cross-pollination of varieties with the se gene with other types of sweet corn results in standard sweet corn. The only way to minimize such contamination is to separate varieties by at least 250 feet, or else plant varieties whose maturities differ by more than two weeks.

What about flavor: is sweetness all we want from sweet corn? The sweeter sweet corn varieties tend to taste more watery, and lack a "corny" flavor. Regular corn varieties — including old varieties like Golden Bantam, Country Gentleman, and Silver Queen — are delectable if picked at just the right stage, then eaten within minutes. Corn with 37 percent sugar tastes too sweet to many gardeners.

Taste a few types of sweet corn, and see which ones suit your taste buds.

Fall garden walks set

This fall spend a Sunday afternoon with the docents of the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens and learn more about the plants, animals and insects around you through a guided tour of the gardens' Conservatory or nature trails.

The gardens are at 1800 N. Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor; 2-1/4 miles north on the Geddes Road intersection. Call (313) 998-7081.

Docent-led conservatory tours for October take place 2 p.m. every Sunday. "The Matthaei Botanical Gardens' Spectacular Plants" is this month's topic and highlights the gardens' large, unusual specimen plants in the conservatory. Participants should sign in at the front lobby reception desk prior to the tour. Conservatory admission is \$2 for adults.

Trail-led tours take place 2 p.m. every Sunday in October. "Flingers, Floaters and Stick-tights" is the topic and highlights the numerous ways in which seeds are spread. Docents examine some of the tricks of seed dispersal. Participants should meet docent guides on the front steps of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens. Admission is free for outdoor trail walks.

FALL SALE

SEPTEMBER 15-OCTOBER 31

Ash

Showroom
Design Studio

Fabrics • Wallcoverings • Custom Draperies
Furnishings/Accessories

33% OFF WALLCOVERINGS

Imperial, Blonder, Thybony, Seabrook, Warner, Greeff
Designer Handprints and others

FABRICS

Robert Allen, Ruth Wilson, Greeff, Kravet and others.

50% OFF BLINDS

Vertical, Mini, Wood, Pleated Shades

RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL
SINCE 1948

2374 Franklin Road • Bloomfield Hills

810-858-7010

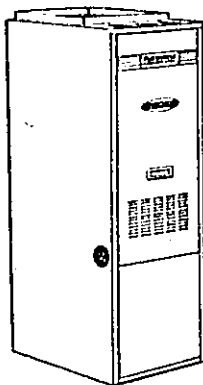
HOURS: Mon.-Fri. 9-5 p.m., Sat. 10-4 p.m.

Our Staff Designers Are Here To Assist You In Making The Right Selection
Wholesale/Retail

SEARS

**PRE-SEASON
CENTRAL
HEATING
OFFER**

0% No Billing
No Payments
No Finance
Charges Until Jan. 1996



Furnaces-Boilers
Mobile Home Applications

For Free In Home Estimates

1-800-659-1174

Full 5 year parts warranty
on all Kenmore furnaces

SEARS

Your Heating and Cooling Headquarters