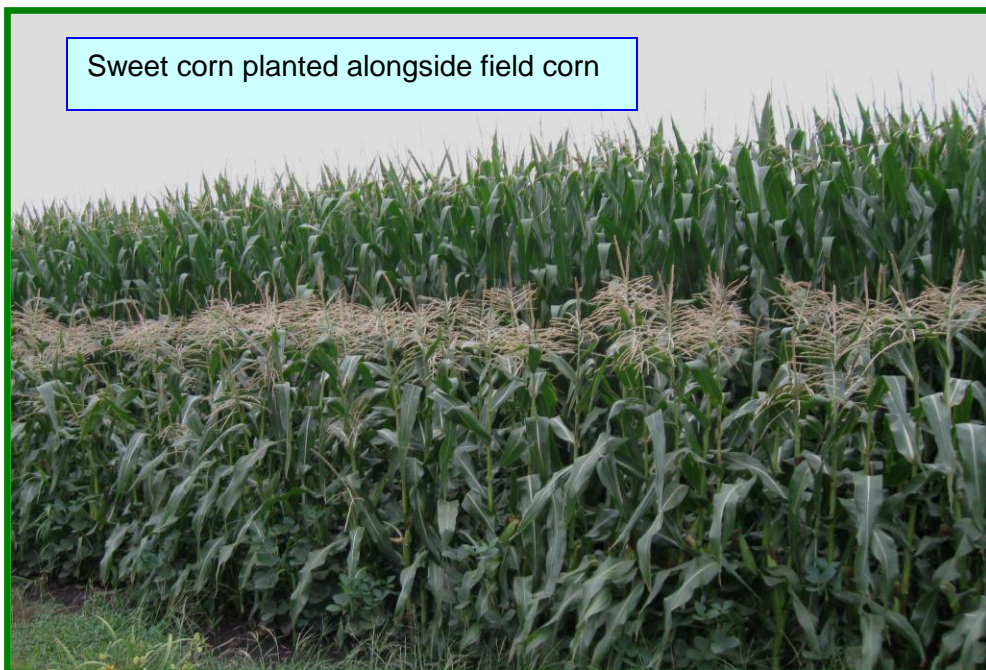


How much does a pirate pay for corn? Answer: A buccaneer. What did the corn say when it was complimented? Answer: Awe, shucks. With no pun intended, I know these jokes are ‘corny’, but I feel they are apropos to introduce one of my favorite veggies — sweet corn.



Every summer I look forward to eating fresh sweet corn. As a child, growing up on the farm, I remember Dad always planted a row or two of sweet corn along the outer edge of the field corn. When it came

time to harvest, I vividly recall helping the family put up corn. My job was usually picking, shucking and removing those persistent, annoying silks. The enjoyable part was eating fresh, home-grown sweet corn.

With the sweet corn season now in full swing, allow me to share with you a few interesting aspects of sweet corn.

Native to the Americas, corn has a long history. Evidence shows it was first domesticated in what is now the Rio Balsas region of Mexico more than seven thousand years ago.

Sweet corn is a genetic mutation of field corn,



producing kernels consisting mostly of sugar rather than starch. Recent sweet corn hybrids have been bred for even higher sugar concentrations. Sweet corn kernels can be yellow, white, or both colors on the same ear (bicolor).

Sweet corn is monoecious which means both male and female flowers are present on each corn plant. The tassel at the top of a corn stalk is the male flower. At the proper time, the tassel releases millions of grains of pollen. The pollen falls on and pollinates the corn silks (the female flowers) emerging from the corn ear. There is one silk for each kernel of corn. The average ear of corn has about 800 kernels, arranged in an even number of rows, typically sixteen. Because corn is wind-pollinated, if one grows sweet corn in a small garden, it is recommended to plant the corn in blocks of rows rather than in a long, single row to insure better pollination.



Not only does sweet corn taste great, but it is cholesterol free. Sweet corn is a good source of vitamins C and A, potassium, thiamine and fiber, and it's very high in antioxidants. Corn on the cob and cut corn is a 100% whole grain. Sweet corn is high in natural sugars/starches, as well as amino acids.



Sweet corn can cross pollinate with other corn including popcorn and field corn. When growing sweet corn next to field corn, it makes sense to plant a variety of sweet corn that

pollinates at a different time than the field corn to avoid cross pollination. Did you know that one can eat field corn in its early stages of development? Field corn has less sugar and more starch than sweet corn; thus, it is less tasty but edible. Looking back, I'm not sure what variety of sweet corn Dad planted next to our field corn. All I know is it always tasted great!

Although I no longer live on the farm, this year was the first year Rita and I planted sweet corn in our little garden. Small in size compared to when Dad grew sweet corn, the outcome was the same — I was able to enjoy eating home-grown sweet corn. Unfortunately, my job remained the same — picking, shucking and removing those persistent, annoying silks.

Now that I've enlightened you with a few corny facts, let me close with one more corny joke. Why is it not wise to tell secrets in the cornfield? Answer: Too many ears!