

A-Maizing Corn: Fairly Bursting With Fiber, Folate

The Folklore: Native Americans believed corn to be the source and sustainer of all life. And rightly so; without corn, early American settlers might not have survived their first winter in New England. The Indians taught them to grow this unfamiliar vegetable by planting seeds with fish (for fertilizer).

The Facts: Botanically known as *Zea Mays L.*, corn descends from a wild grass called teosinte, which originated in Mexico. Today's corn plants are taller than early maize. The kernel consists of the outer hull, the endosperm (mostly starch) and the germ (where the nutrients and oil are).

Most corn grown in the U.S. is "field corn," fed to livestock and used to make corn sweeteners, corn oil and cornstarch for use in products from bread to whiskey to ethanol fuel.

The corn we eat as a vegetable is "sweet corn"—yellow or white. Popcorn is a special type of corn with a harder endosperm. Flour corn produces corn flour used for tortilla chips. Indian corn has red, purple, brown, white or multicolored kernels and is mostly used decoratively. Baby corn is sweet corn that's harvested very early.

The Findings: Yellow and white corn alike are super sources of fiber (4 grams per cup of kernels, about one large ear), folate (71 micrograms) and potassium (416 milligrams). Corn also delivers some protein, vitamin C, B vitamins, magnesium, phosphorus and zinc. Yellow corn adds the bonus of lutein, a carotenoid linked to eye health. And corn oil is a source of polyunsaturated fat and phytosterols, which may reduce cholesterol. As a starchy vegetable, corn has more calories than other vegetables (132 per cup), even more if it's "creamstyle," though oddly, no added fat. Beware the sodium in canned corn.

The Finer Points: When buying fresh corn on the cob, select ears with close-fitting green husks, golden silks and

plump kernels that are tightly spaced and extend all the way to the ear's tip.

Sweet corn has a gene that naturally delays sugar from converting to starch while on the stalk. Once picked, the conversion begins, especially if the corn is exposed to sunlight or high temperature. However, newer varieties stay sweet longer than in the past, when fresh corn was best eaten the day it was picked. Now, most fresh corn at farmers' markets are the new super-sweet varieties that remain sweet for a few days, if refrigerated.

Fresh corn can be steamed, boiled, grilled or microwaved and eaten on or off the cob. If boiling, don't add salt to the water; it makes the kernels tough and less flavorful. Immerse small ears for just three to four minutes, larger ears for five to seven. If grilling, husk the outer layers, leaving only the inner layer, pull down to remove the silk, then close the husk, soak in water and grill. For a fiber boost, add any kind of corn kernels to soups, casseroles, salsas and muffin batters. To avoid genetically modified corn, buy certified organic corn or look for products with GMO-free labels.

EN's Zesty Corn Salad

1 can yellow corn, drained (or the kernels from two large fresh ears, cooked)
 1 can black beans, rinsed
 1 large red pepper, diced
 1 large green pepper, diced
 3 scallions, sliced thinly
 1 tablespoon Balsamic vinegar
 ½ cup chopped cilantro (or more to taste)
 2 teaspoons olive oil
 ½ teaspoon cumin
 pepper to taste

Mix all ingredients together. Let stand in the refrigerator a few hours before serving.

Makes about 8 (1/2-cup) servings.

Nutrition Information Per Serving:

116 calories; 3 grams protein; 4 grams fat; 3.4 grams fiber; about 200 milligrams sodium (depends on type of corn and beans used).

- **Vitamin C helps keep lungs healthy over time**, according to a nine-year study of 1,346 adults in the United Kingdom. Researchers collected information on participants' diets and respiratory symptoms and tested a measure of lung function 10 years apart. While vitamin C and magnesium were both associated with better scores at each testing, vitamin C alone was protective over time. By slowing the loss of lung function, vitamin C-rich foods may reduce the risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (e.g. emphysema and bronchitis), the researchers conclude.

American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, May 1, 2002.

- **Drinking cranberry juice cocktail prevents even the most tenacious bacteria from adhering to the urinary tract and eventually causing urinary tract infections (UTI's)**, suggests research from Rutgers University in New Jersey. In a laboratory study, samples of antibiotic-resistant *E. coli* from women with UTI's were incubated in urine from healthy women before and after drinking eight ounces of cranberry juice cocktail. Urine collected from women *before* they drank the cocktail failed to prevent bacterial adhesion. But urine from women *after* they drank the cocktail prevented adhesion for up to 10 hours.

Journal of the American Medical Association, June 19, 2002.

- **A high-potassium intake may help protect the bones of postmenopausal women who eat high-salt diets**, say researchers from the University of California at San Francisco. Women eating 5,200 milligrams of sodium per day, without extra potassium, lost more than five times as much calcium in their urine as those eating the same high-salt diet, but taking a potassium supplement. Salt promotes calcium loss in the urine, but adding potassium seems to counteract that, conclude the researchers. To be safe, stick to potassium-rich foods, not supplements.

The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism, May 2002.

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