

# HAVE A CORNY FOURTH OF JULY

Corn, as we all know, is in tons of the foods we eat. It's been fed to the animals we consume, and it's a hidden ingredient (in the form of starch, syrup, oil, etc.) in many, if not most, processed foods. A supermarket in which all products containing corn were eliminated would be "little more than just fresh fruit and vegetables with a fish counter," Andrew F. Smith writes in "The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink" (Oxford University Press, 2007). It's interesting to note, however, that fish sticks often contain corn -- in the breading.

That's according to Betty Fussell. In her encyclopedic "The Story of Corn" (Knopf, 1992), she also found corn in beer and wine and in an amazing array of nonedibles, including paint, insecticides, toothpaste, lipstick, shaving cream, shoe polish, detergents, tobacco, rayon, tanned leather, rubber tires, urethane foam, explosives and embalming fluid.

It's clear that we are consuming enough (or too many) corn byproducts. But are we eating enough CORN? "Real" corn -- fresh corn -- is a delicacy, a short-lived marvel and a cause for celebration. It is truly an American food, a New World plant that evolved from wild grasses in Central America. If you can get fresh, local corn for your Fourth of July celebration, consider it your patriotic duty.

When Lisa Skye wrote her new cookbook, "I Love Corn" (Andrews McMeel, 2012), she was not out to celebrate the corn in lipstick and embalming fluid. Instead Skye, a producer for the Discovery Channel's "Go Ahead, Make My Dinner," inveigled her many chef and food-professional friends to contribute recipes celebrating fresh corn, on or off the cob.

The recipes here are from Skye's book. The Mexican-style grilled corn, with its coating of mayo and cheese, is not exactly a celebration of the plain goodness of corn-on-the-cob. But it looks so festive -- like a giant firecracker -- that it's hard to resist it on the Fourth of July.

Note: There are many ways to cook corn-on-the-cob. Some home cooks rave about the virtues of the microwave. Others soak the corn in its husk and grill it over coals. I will speak up for the old-fashioned method: boiling.

Bring a big pot of UNSALTED water to a rolling boil. (Salt



Fresh corn, just off the cob, stars in this festive, colorful salad. Credit: Photograph by Bill Brady for "I Love Corn" by Lisa Skye, Andrews McMeel, 2012.

toughens the kernels.) Add just enough corn to fit comfortably in the pot; you can cook it in batches. Cover the pot immediately and bring the water back to a boil. The minute it reaches that second boil, remove the corn. Serve it hot, plain or with just salt. Or salt and butter. Or salt and a squeeze of lime. This garnish is especially delicious if you have ignored my boiling advice and grilled the corn.

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## FRESH CORN AND BLACK BEAN SALAD

Yield: 8 servings

4 medium ears fresh corn, husks and silks removed

2 (14-ounce) cans black beans, drained and rinsed

1/2 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and coarsely chopped

1/2 yellow bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and coarsely chopped

1/2 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and coarsely chopped

1 scallion, white parts trimmed and sliced into rings and green parts chopped OR 1 jalapeno pepper, stemmed, seeded and chopped

1 tablespoon olive oil

3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

1/4 teaspoon ground cumin

Juice of 2 lemons or limes (or 1 of each)

Sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Chopped fresh cilantro, to taste (optional)

Cook the corn however you like. Cut a thin slice off the fattest end of the ear and stand the ear upright on the flat end in a large mixing

bowl. Using a sharp knife, strip the kernels from the cob. Repeat with remaining ears. You will have about 4 1/2 cups kernels. Discard the cobs.

Add beans, bell peppers, scallion (or jalapeno), oil, garlic, cumin and lime juice and toss to mix. Season to taste with salt and pepper, add cilantro (if using), toss again and serve.

Recipe contributed by food consultant Terry Fishman to "I Love Corn" by Lisa Skye (Andrews McMeel, 2012).

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## GRILLED CORN, MEXICAN STYLE

Yield: 6 servings

6 ears fresh corn, husks and silks removed

3/4 cup freshly grated cotija or pecorino Romano cheese

3/4 teaspoon ground chile pequin or chili powder

1/4 cup mayonnaise

1 fresh lime, cut into 6 wedges

Prepare a grill for direct cooking over high heat. Place corn directly on the grill and cook about 10 minutes, turning frequently so the corn is browned all over.

Meanwhile, mix cheese and chili powder on a platter big enough to roll the corn. Attach corn holders to each end of the grilled corn. "Frost" the corn with mayonnaise and then roll it in the cheese mixture. Serve immediately, with lime wedges on the side.

Recipe contributed by Leslie Meenan of Cafe Habana in New York to "I Love Corn" by Lisa Skye (Andrews McMeel, 2012).