

Celebrate abundance of sweet corn today

By Greg Morago

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A dish of grilled corn with ancho chili lime butter and manchego cheese shown at Liberty Kitchen, 1050 Studewood, Tuesday, June 26, 2012, in Houston. (Melissa Phillip / Houston Chronicle) Photo: Melissa Phillip / © 2012 Houston Chronicle



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This was the season corn really popped in Texas. After last year's drought devastated the crop - statewide, about half the normal yield - corn rebounded this year.

"The weather this year has been excellent for Texas sweet corn," said [Chris Romano](#), produce and floral coordinator of Whole Foods Market Southwest Region.

"Due to mild winter conditions and a cool, wet spring, the season got off to an early start."

But the same weather that giveth also taketh away.

That delicious abundance is fading fast.

Record-shattering heat is also putting an end to local sweet corn, which is starting to wind down in the marketplace. Think of today (July 4 is always perfect time to celebrate native corn) as the

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beginning of your last hurrah for good local ears.

In other words, eat up.

[Phillip Thielemann](#) is.

An agriculture teacher who lives on his family's farm in Richmond, he is particularly proud of this year's crop, a triumph over last year's underperformance.

"This year it was great. It was really super sweet. The ears were filled out all the way to the end," Thielemann said. "The way we know we've got sweet corn is when you bite into it, those kernels literally need to explode in your mouth."

They did. And if you want to catch the fireworks, find some good local corn and try these recipes from Houston chefs.

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Crispy Corn Croquettes

Courtesy chef John Sikhattana, Straits

- 7 ears corn, shucked
- 1½ teaspoons white pepper
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup corn starch
- ¼ cup rice flour
- ½ cup all purpose flour
- ¼ cup small diced celery
- ¼ cup chopped green onions
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro
- ½ cup small diced red onion
- ½ teaspoon minced garlic

Vegetable oil for frying

Instructions: Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl and mix until loosely incorporated. Form into 2-ounce cakes and pan fry with vegetable oil on medium heat until golden brown on both sides.

Grilled Summer Corn Salad

Courtesy Skewers Mediterranean Grill

For the salad:

- 1½ pounds slender green beans, trimmed
- 5 ears fresh corn, husk and silk removed
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, cut into 1/2-inch slices



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- 1/2 pound cherry tomatoes, stemmed and cut in half
- 1/4 pound feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup loosely packed arugula leaves

For the vinaigrette:

- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 2-inch piece seedless cucumber, finely shredded
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Salt
- White pepper

Instructions: Heat the fire in an outdoor grill for corn. Bring a large saucepan of lightly salted water to boil. Fill a mixing bowl with ice and water, set aside.

Add green beans to boiling water and cook for 3-5 minutes or just until tender. Drain and transfer to bowl of ice water. Cool, drain and set aside. When grill is ready, lightly brush the fresh corn with olive oil. Grill, turning frequently with tongs to prevent burning for 5-7 minutes or until kernels are evenly golden brown. Remove corn to a platter. Lightly brush onion slices with oil and grill for 2-3 minutes per side until golden brown. Transfer to the platter with the corn and set aside to cool. Once corn is cool enough to handle, use a sharp knife to cut off kernels. Transfer the corn to a bowl with the green beans. Coarsely chop the grilled onions and add to bowl along with tomatoes, feta and arugula. For the dressing, place the yogurt, shredded cucumber, olive oil, lemon juice, dill and sugar in a food processor. Pulse until thoroughly combined. Pulse in salt and white pepper to taste. Add dressing to vegetables. Toss until combined and serve immediately.

Sweet Texas Corn with Ancho Chile Lime Butter and Manchego Cheese

Courtesy Liberty Kitchen

- 6 whole corns, husks on
- 1 stick unsalted butter at room temperature
- 2 tablespoons ancho chile powder
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 limes, juice and zest of 1
- 1/4 pound quality Manchego cheese, finely grated

Instructions: Pull back husk but do not remove (remove only silk). Place all other ingredients except cheese in a bowl and thoroughly incorporate. Grill corn over open flame until kernels start to caramelize. Immediately roll in butter mixture, coating evenly. Place corn on serving platter and sprinkle with cheese. Serve immediately.



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Killen's Creamed Corn

Courtesy [Ronnie Killen](#), Killen's Steakhouse

8 ears of corn

1 cup cream

1½ cups milk

1 stick unsalted butter

¼ cup sugar (can use more or less, depending on corn sweetness)

⅛ teaspoon white pepper

⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Salt to taste

Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated

Instructions: Shuck and cut corn off ears. Bring milk and cream to a simmer and add corn cobs to infuse for about 30 minutes. In a separate pan melt butter and add corn niblets, sauté corn over low heat for about 20 minutes. Remove cobs from milk/cream mixture and scrape off all milk. Discard cobs. Add ¼ of the sautéed corn to milk/cream mixture and blend until smooth. Add the rest of the corn and simmer till thickened usually about another 30 minutes. Season to taste and put in casserole dish. Finish in a 500-degree or as high as your broiler will go, with a little cheese sprinkled on top. Broil until cheese just turns brown. Serve immediately.

Chile Corn Salad with Queso Fresco

Courtesy Ryan Pera, Revival Market

6 ears corn, shucked and silk removed

4 teaspoons vegetable oil

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon chile powder

¼ cup small diced red bell pepper

1 small diced jalapeño (remove seeds for less heat)

¼ cup crumbled queso fresco cheese

2 tablespoons Mexican style crema (or sour cream)

¼ cup chopped cilantro

2 tablespoons chopped red onion

1 tablespoon olive oil

Salt and pepper

Instructions: In a large bowl mix the corn, oil, salt and chile powder until the ears of corn are evenly coated. Over a charcoal or gas grill, cook the corn until slightly charred and cooked through (a total of 6-8 minutes). Remove and let cool. Carefully remove kernels from cob into a mixing bowl. Add remaining ingredients and season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve chilled or at room temperature. Garnish with more queso fresco crumbles.

Elote Loco

Courtesy [chef Michael Pellegrino](#), Max's Wine Dive

6 ears of corn (unshucked)

4 ounces butter

½ pound cotija cheese

1 bottle of Valentina salsa (your choice on heat)

2 tablespoons chili powder

¼ bunch cilantro

Valentina Aioli (See below)

Valentina Aioli

3 egg yolks

1½ cups vegetable oil

¼-½ cups of Valentina salsa (depending on heat)

Juice of two limes

½ teaspoon salt

Instructions: Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place the ears of corn on a sheet tray and bake for 20 minutes. Let the ears cool. Once cool, shuck and remove the kernels from the cobs and set kernels aside. For the Valentina aioli, place the egg yolks and lime juice in a bowl and whisk briefly. While whisking, slowly add the oil to the egg mixture, creating a smooth emulsion. Once all the oil has been added, add the salt and the Valentina salsa. Adjust the heat profile by adding more Valentina Salsa, if needed. To complete: In a sauce pan, melt the butter and toss in the corn kernels and cook over mid-high heat for 8 minutes. To plate: In a tall glass, place 2 inches of the warm corn/butter mixture. Then add a layer of Valentina aioli, cotija cheese and a sprinkle of chili powder and lime juice. Repeat with a second layer, topping it off with the chili powder and lime juice. Garnish with cilantro.

Fresh Corn and Chicken Thighs in Hot and Sour Soup

Courtesy Ouisie's Table

2 to 2 ½ pound chicken

3 celery sticks with leaves

3 medium carrot sticks, peeled

1 small onion, peeled and quartered

2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger

¼ teaspoon (or more) red chili pepper flakes

¼ cup lime juice

1 tablespoon sesame oil

3 tablespoons soy sauce

2 ounces rice wine vinegar

5 ounce can coconut milk

Pinch of Szechwan peppercorns

4 chicken thighs, fat removed

4 to 5 corn cobs, husk and silk removed

Instructions: To prepare chicken broth, rinse bird, and cut into quarters. Place bird in large soup pot. Cover with cold water. Bring to a boil then cut heat to a steady simmer. Tilt the lid. Skim when needed. Chop celery sticks, carrots and yellow onion. Add to the pot. When vegetables are soft remove and discard. Remove chicken to cool, then pull the tender meat from the bones.

Discard bones. For the thighs discard all fat from 4 chicken thighs, wash under cold running water. Add to hot broth. Simmer until chicken thighs are tender and done. Remove thighs and let cool. Add ginger, pepper flakes, lime juice, oil, soy sauce, vinegar, pepper and coconut milk to the stock and remove from heat. Cut chicken thighs into 1 inch pieces and add to chicken stock. Bring to a simmer. Add meat from the chicken.

Cut corn off cobs into a bowl and scrape cobs for their juices. Add to soup. Stir, adjust seasonings, serve hot.

Serve in bowls and garnish with chopped green onions fresh basil, thyme and mint.

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