

## Sweet Corn

Corn is a member of the grass family of plants and a native grain of the Americas. It was first grown by the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca Indians more than 5,600 years ago and probably originated in Guatemala. Corn, squash and beans were known as the "Three Sisters" by the Native Americans - sisters who should be planted together. Early corn was believed to be similar to oats and barley with each individual kernel covered in a husk with many scientists believing that the ancestor of corn is a Mexican grass called teosinte.

When Columbus landed in the West Indies, he was given corn by the Native Americans, which he took back to Spain. From there, corn spread quickly throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Both the United States and the rest of the world however use corn primarily as livestock feed today. The yellow coloured pigments in corn are created by a group of highly beneficial antioxidants called carotenoids (Lutei and zeaxanthin) that remove damaging free radicals in the body. Red and yellow colours mostly signify the presence of such carotenoids in vegetables which as you guessed were first found in carrots. They possess powerful immune-boosting and cancer fighting properties. The two carotenoids found in corn work together to help maintain sharp, healthy eyesight, They are used in the area of the retina called the macula, which is the centre for sharp, focused vision. They protect the eyes from long-term light damage and macular degeneration, so in addition to eating your carrots it is wise to include corn to ensure healthy vision in old age.

Corn is also said to aid in wound healing, strengthen the immune system by boosting antibody production and keeping the skin and mucous membranes in good condition. Its deep sweet flavor also helps stabilize blood sugar and maintains blood fat levels and is often used to tonify the Pancreas in Macrobiotic cooking. In herbal medicine it is the silk of the corn that is used therapeutically. Known as Yu Mi Xu in Chinese Medicine, it is one of the few western herbs that has proven so effective as to creep into the Chinese Pharmacopeia, and is used to regulate the Gallbladder and urinary bladder in hot inflamed conditions. In the west corn silk is considered a soothing, relaxing diuretic and a valuable remedy for acute inflammation and irritation of the genito-urinary tract. Such conditions include cystitis, urethritis and prostatitis and may be symptomatically relieved by a home brew of the tea. Corn silk is also often found to be useful for calming bladder irritation and infection in children and sometimes relieves bedwetting when combined with chamomile. Serious bladder infections require the attention of a qualified healthcare practitioner however as they can quickly spread to the kidneys. Being a gentle diuretic corn silk generally clears toxins and irritants out of the kidneys and bladder, leaving a gentle antiseptic and healing action. By reducing fluid retention in the body, corn silk may even help reduce blood pressure, and by aiding elimination of toxins from the body corn silk is often useful in the treatment of gout and arthritis. Topically corn silk's healing and soothing properties are helpful for relieving skin irritation and inflammation and for healing wounds and ulcers. Such wonderful healing qualities are of course always stronger in organic produce.