

Farm to Table: Bigger and Better

Two longtime garden favorites—corn and melons—take on starring roles.

I grew up eating fresh corn on the cob with butter and melons in the form of thick, cold slices piled on a platter—that was the only way they were served. Period.

And I still never get sick of either one. As the years go by, though, these garden staples keep surprising me with their versatility: succotash, a handful of fresh corn in cornbread, corn and black bean salad. Those made sense and comfortably increased my repertoire of summertime standards.

I found melon in dressed compotes—a little citrus juice, honey, cinnamon, or champagne or white wine—and that new discovery quickly became old-hat. But, corn in puddings, pancakes and soufflés; salads with grilled or roasted corn; melon with hot peppers and savory vinaigrettes ... This small-town Midwestern girl could never have imagined those!

I'm so grateful to have learned, over the years, about how other cooks across the nation—indeed, around the world—use these two fantastic gifts from the garden. It seems to me that maybe this wider knowledge and the delight it brings are what make getting older worthwhile.

I don't have the energy of my 10-year-old self anymore, but I know a lot more than she ever did—including more than one delicious way to eat corn and watermelon.

Corn Pudding

This rich, Southern classic bridges the transition from summer to fall, working equally well as an accompaniment to grilled meats and cold salads on a picnic as it does a side-dish to roast chicken or turkey at an autumn-harvest dinner.

Ingredients 1/2 cup butter 3 T. flour 2 T. sugar 1 tsp. salt 1/2 tsp. black pepper 1/4 tsp. hot pepper sauce 1/2 cup milk 2 eggs, beaten 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder 2 1/2 cups fresh corn kernels

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Chop corn kernels very coarsely (do not puree; texture should be rough) and set aside. Stir together flour, sugar, salt and pepper in a small bowl.

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat, melt butter. Add flour mixture and stir well. Add hot pepper sauce, milk, eggs and baking powder, and stir until well-combined. Stir in corn. Pour mixture into buttered 2-quart casserole dish. Bake for 45 minutes or until the top is golden brown and the center is set. Serves 6 to 8.

Corn, Pepper and Spinach Sauté

To get the maximum flavor and texture out of this dish, use fresh, young corn (ears should have moist, green silks, and the kernels should be pale—not golden—yellow). Keep a close eye on the vegetables to avoid overcooking them.

Ingredients 2 T. olive oil 1/2 cup diced white or yellow onion 1 cup diced red bell pepper 2 T. finely chopped, fresh medium-hot chile pepper, such as Anaheim, Sonora or Sandia 1 tsp. minced, fresh garlic 3 T. dry white wine or chicken or vegetable broth 12 ounces fresh spinach, washed, stems removed 3 cups fresh, young corn kernels salt and freshly ground pepper to taste 2 T. slivered, fresh basil

Preparation

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat olive oil. Add onion, peppers and garlic, and sauté just until the onion starts to soften. Add wine or broth, heat through, and add spinach. Continue sautéing until leaves wilt.

Add corn, reduce heat to medium, cover, and let cook for three to four minutes or just until corn becomes tender. Remove from heat, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with slivers of fresh basil. Serves 6 to 8.

Roasted Corn Salad with Tomatoes and Feta Cheese

Ingredients 1 T. peanut oil 2 cups fresh corn kernels 1 cup diced, fresh, firm tomatoes, such as plum or Roma 1/3 cup julienned red onion 1/3 cup chopped fresh cilantro 1/2 T. seeded and minced, fresh jalapeno pepper 3 T. extra-virgin olive oil 2 T. fresh lime juice 2 T. red wine vinegar 1/2 tsp. cumin 1/2 tsp. sugar 1/4 tsp. salt coarsely ground black pepper to taste

2/3 cup crumbled feta cheese

Preparation

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Drizzle peanut oil over the corn kernels, and stir to coat. Spread corn evenly in a single layer on a heavy, rimmed baking sheet or baking dish. Stirring two or three times, roast corn until kernels are browned and tender. Remove from oven and let cool to room temperature.

When kernels are cool, place in a large bowl. Add tomatoes, onion, cilantro and jalapeno pepper. In a jar with a tight-fitting lid, combine olive oil, lime juice, vinegar, cumin, sugar, salt and black pepper; shake to mix well, and pour over vegetables.

Stir to coat vegetables with vinaigrette. Gently stir in feta cheese and serve immediately.

You can chill the salad to serve it later, but take it out of the refrigerator and let it sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving. Serves 4.

Chilled Cantaloupe Soup

Use the ripest, sweetest cantaloupes you can find for this soup. Serve in chilled dessert bowls or small melon shells.

Ingredients 8 cups chopped cantaloupe 1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice 1/2 cup semi-sweet white wine, such as Riesling or Vouvray 2 T. fresh lime juice 1 tsp. cinnamon 1/2 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg 1 cup plain yogurt honey (optional) fresh berries (any kind) and mint leaves for garnish

Preparation

Puree cantaloupe in blender or food processor. Pour into a large bowl, and add orange juice, wine, lime juice, cinnamon and nutmeg; mix well. Stir in yogurt.

Since melons can differ widely in sweetness, taste to adjust the seasonings. If it's too tart, add 2 tablespoons of honey; if too sweet, add more lime juice. Refrigerate several hours before serving. Garnish individual servings with a few berries and mint leaves. Serves 6.

Melon Compote with Spiced Honey-ginger Syrup

Ingredients 4 cups any combination of melons, cut into 1 1/2-inch chunks or scooped into balls 3/4 cup water 1/3 cup honey 2 T. fresh lemon juice 1 T. fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped 3 inches stick cinnamon 1 tsp. whole cloves 1/2 cup flaked or coarsely grated, fresh coconut

Preparation

Place melon chunks or balls in a large bowl and refrigerate.

In a small saucepan, combine water, honey, lemon juice, ginger, cinnamon stick and whole cloves. Stir to combine. Bring to a gentle boil over medium-high heat; immediately reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for five to seven minutes, until spices permeate syrup.

Remove from heat and let cool to room temperature. Strain to remove ginger and spices. Reserving 3 tablespoons of syrup, pour the rest over the melon, stir gently to coat, and refrigerate for one hour or more.

To serve, spoon melon and the reserved syrup into individual, chilled bowls. Garnish with fresh coconut. Serves 4 to 6.

Watermelon-cucumber Salsa

Serve this hot-cool salsa with tortilla chips and to accompany grilled chicken, pork or fish. Or, double the quantities, cut the watermelon and cucumber into larger chunks, and serve it as a salad.

Ingredients 2 cups diced watermelon 1 cup peeled, seeded and diced cucumber 1/2 cup chopped green onions 1/4 cup minced, fresh cilantro 2 to 3 tsp. minced, hot, fresh chile pepper (to taste) 1 T. orange zest 3 T. freshly squeezed orange juice 1 T. fresh lime juice 1/2 tsp. chile powder

Preparation

Place diced watermelon and cucumber in a colander. Cover with a plate or cloth and let drain for one hour at room

temperature.

Combine drained watermelon and cucumber with remaining ingredients and stir well to combine. Chill two or more hours before serving. Makes about 3 cups.

Find more recipe ideas online, and [click here](#) to learn how to grow your own heirloom melons.