

Sweet Corn Growing Tips

by Kory Nickell:K-State



Basics of Zea mays

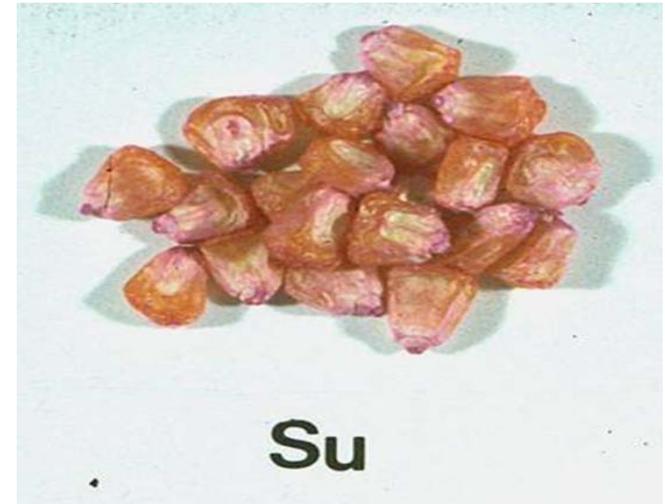
- Gramineae family
- Height: 4-6 foot
- Spread: 1-1.5 feet
- Varieties of Yellow, White, and Bi-color types

Normal (Su), Sugar-enhanced (Se), and Supersweet (sh2)



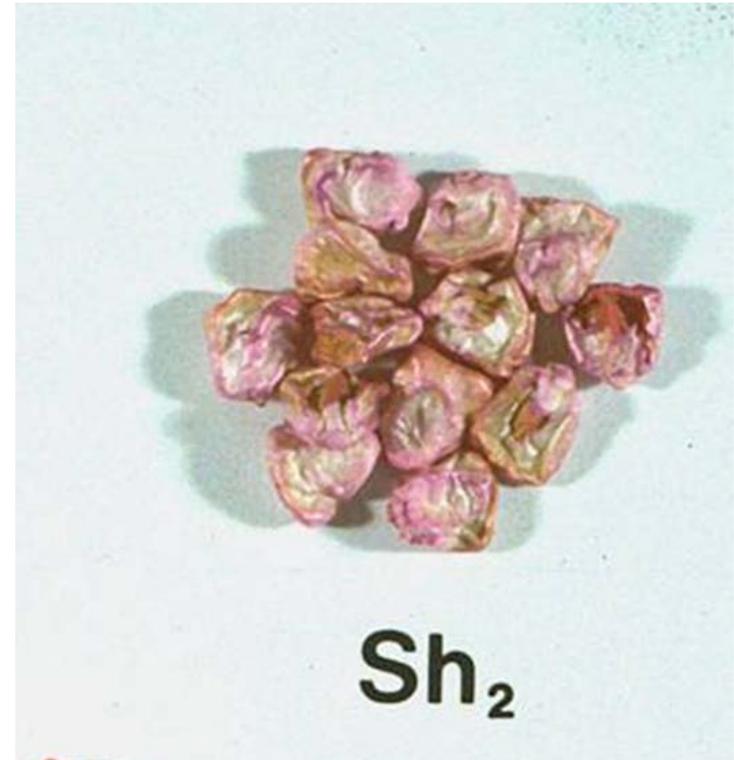
Su or Sugary “Ordinary” Sweetcorn

- Known since 1930s
- Good germination in cool soil
- Moderately sweet
- Loses sugar quickly after harvest
- Tender seed coat
- Creamy texture
- If cross pollenize, mixture of 2 varieties



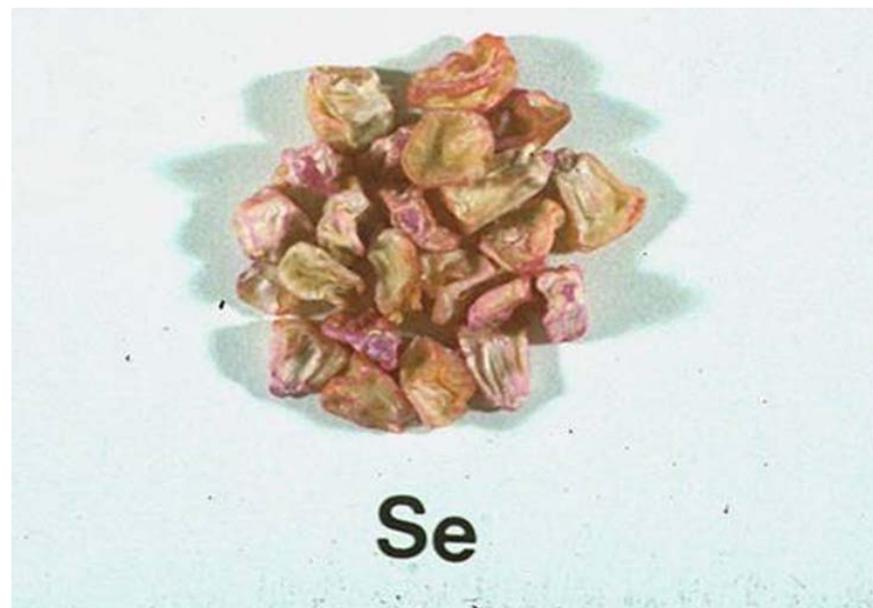
SH2 or Shrunk-2 “Supersweet”

- Shriveled, shrunken seed
- Poor germination in cool soil
- Excellent sweetness (2 ½ times)
- Retains sugar longer
- Tough seed coat
- Watery texture
- If cross pollenized, reverts to ‘field corn’



'Xtra Sweet' or Sugary Enhanced- SE

- Moderately shriveled seed
- Fair germination in cool soil
- Good sweetness
- Loses sugar moderately
- Tender seed coat
- Creamy texture
- If cross pollenized, mix of 2 varieties



Plant growth characteristics

- Requires full sun, fertile soil, consistent moisture, warm weather, and plenty of space.
 - To save space in the garden, you can interplant corn with early harvested cool-season crops
- Plant seed no earlier than 1 week before the last frost.
 - Mid-April to early May in Eastern and Central KS region.
- Days to maturity
 - Short season=65-75; Mid-season=75-85; Long season=>85

Planting tips

- Germination soil temperature: 65 F to 85 F
 - Will not germinate in soil temperatures below 55 F—black plastic can help
- Expect 4-7 days to emergence
 - Supersweet types require more moisture, soil temperatures above 60 F, and often take longer to germinate, wait to plant these in late May
- Plant seed 1 - 1 1/2 inches deep
- Plant in blocks of at least 4 rows or in clumps or hills with about 3-4 plants per clump.

Fertilization

- Thrives in deep, rich soils, but any well-drained garden soil should produce sweet corn.
- Corn responds to high levels of fertilizer.
 - 1-2 pounds of 10-10-10 or 12-12-12 per 100 ft² at planting
 - 3 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer per 100 ft² of row at 8-10"
 - 3 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer per 100 ft² of row at tasseling in sandy soils or during wet years
- For heavy yields, make sure crop is receiving 1 - 1 ½ inches water per week particularly at the reproductive stages - tasseling, silking, and grain fill.

Successive plantings

- For continuous supply of corn:
 - Plant an early maturing variety first. Two weeks later, plant another block of an early maturing + mid- and late-season hybrids. Continue planting until middle of June.
 - For earlier planted corn, emergence will be slow. Therefore, wait until the prior planting is 1 to 2 inches tall before planting the next.

Corn earworm



Final words

- Sweet corn is rich in carbohydrates and sugars and contains vitamins A, B, and C, minerals and protein.
- Seed can be saved for 2 years
- It is an excellent vegetable for freezing or canning, which can then be stored for year-round use.