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When to Water Sweet Corn

To produce large ears full of plump kernels, sweet corn (*Zea mays*) needs constantly moist soil. Sweet corn is an annual plant that grows best in deep, fertile soil in full sun, and doesn't tolerate drought. In dry conditions, plants grow poorly and their ears contain shriveled or blank kernels. To provide constant moisture around sweet corn roots, water the ground before sowing, and water plants weekly from sowing to harvest or whenever the soil surface is dry. Good weed control and mulches spread around the plants help retain moisture in the soil.

Sowing Sweet Corn

Amending and watering the soil before sowing sweet corn provides moist conditions for the sprouting seeds. Dig 2 inches of compost or well-rotted manure into the top 8 inches of soil, and rake the surface until it's fine and crumbly. Draw a hoe 1 inch deep through the soil to create rows 12 inches apart, or spaced according to the instructions on the seed packet. Water the rows thoroughly with fine spray on a garden hose and allow the water to drain away. Sow two or three seeds every 4 inches, and rake the loose soil over the seeds. Sow sweet corn in blocks for the best harvest from this wind-pollinated plant.

Watering Young Plants

Water young sweet corn plants regularly so that the soil stays moist, and spread mulch to help retain soil moisture. Water sweet corn whenever the soil surface dries out, but don't saturate the soil. The surface should feel just moist to the touch and water should drain away from around the plants within 10 to 20 seconds. Water first thing in the morning so



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any moisture that gets on the leaves has time to dry during the day. Thin sweet corn seedlings when three or four leaves appear, removing the weaker seedlings to leave about 8 inches between plants in their rows. Spread a mulch such as eight layers of newspaper, 2 inches of garden compost or 4 inches of straw between the plants. Don't spread mulch near the plant stems where it could cause rotting. Weigh newspaper down with stones or spread an organic mulch over it.

Irrigating Maturing Plants

Sweet corn needs plenty of water in dry summer weather as plants mature and regular weeding to remove competing weeds. Water sweet corn in the morning once a week if there are no heavy downpours, giving each plant 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water. Water an area 2 feet in diameter around the base of each plant, and apply the water slowly to prevent it running off if the ground is dry. Weeds compete with sweet corn for water, so remove them after watering the plants when the ground is moist and they're easy to pull up. Alternatively, cut the weeds off at their bases with a hoe before watering the sweet corn, taking care not to disturb the sweet corn roots.

Fertilizing Sweet Corn

Sweet corn grows best in moist soil, but it also needs regular feeding. Sprinkle a slow-release granular fertilizer over the soil surface when sowing sweet corn, such as a 12-4-8 product at a rate of 4 tablespoons per 4 square feet. When the plants are 15 inches and 30 inches tall, apply a 24-8-16 liquid fertilizer diluted at a rate of 1 tablespoon per 1 gallon of water. Apply 1 gallon of fertilizer solution to four sweet corn plants every week, or dilute and apply the product according to the instructions on the label.

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- Organic Gardening: Corn -- A Growing Guide

About the Author



A graduate of Leeds University, Jenny Green completed Master of Arts in English literature in 1998 and has been writing about travel, gardening, science and pets since 2007. Green's work appears in Diva, Whole Life Times, Listverse, Earthtimes, Lamplight, Stupefying Stories and other websites and magazines.

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