

Living in America



- ARKANSAS
- ILLINOIS
- INDIANA
- IOWA
- MASSACHUSETTS
- NEW MEXICO
- RHODE ISLAND
- SOUTH CAROLINA
- TEXAS



INDIANA
SUCCOTASH

This old American Indian dish gets its name from the Narragansett word *misick-quatash*, which means “fragments.” In other words, succotash is a jumble. In Indiana, one of the great corn states, green beans replace the traditional lima beans. Eighteenth-century Americans added salt pork, but today the emphasis is on freshness, accentuated here by cooking the beans very briefly to retain a little snap.

IOWA
CREAMED CORN

The arrival of the sweet corn harvest in Iowa, the country’s biggest corn producer, quickens the pulse, and bowls of creamed corn show up on every table. The liquid that oozes from the kernels when an ear of corn is scraped over a grater is called milk. Thickened with butter, it makes a rich, velvety, and (best of all) corny broth. That’s two corn textures in one dish.



WITHIN EVERY COB IS THE KERNEL OF A GREAT AMERICAN RECIPE

CORN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARCUS NILSSON
TEXT BY WILLIAM GRIMES

ALL-AMERICAN CORN ON THE COB

This is how Americans envision corn in their dreams: a golden ear dripping with butter and sprinkled generously with salt and pepper. Roasted, grilled, or boiled, corn on the cob has been a cornerstone of the national cuisine since the Wampanoag tribe taught the Pilgrims how to grow the grain.



RHODE ISLAND JOHNNYCAKES

Feelings run high in Rhode Island about the unleavened corn pancakes known as johnnycakes (perhaps from *journey cake* or *Shawnee cake*). Eaten for breakfast or as a side dish, like biscuits, they come in two forms. A thin, milky batter, like the one in our recipe, produces the light, crisp cake known as Newport, or East Bay, style. West Bay cakes are thicker, smaller, and softer.

AMERICA IS CORN COUNTRY. FOR EVERY AMBER WAVE OF GRAIN THERE'S AN ENDLESS FIELD, STRETCHING TO THE

horizon, of golden corn, standing tall and rustling in the breeze. It is the nation's leading crop. American farmers produced more than 13 billion bushels of corn last year. Nearly all of it was field corn, the type that feeds cows, chickens, and pigs or is converted to ethanol fuel. Some went to cornstarch, cornflakes, and the infamous high-fructose corn syrup. There were also 166 million bushels of the corn most people know best: sweet corn, the American ingredient par excellence and the source and inspiration for thousands of beloved dishes.

The numbers are impressive. But numbers tell only half the story. Corn's real stature comes from the enthusiasm with which American cooks embraced the strange-looking plant they called Indian corn, whose origin many tribes regarded as miraculous. In one American Indian legend, corn came to Earth when a woman with blond hair appeared before a hermit. She told him to burn the dry grass around her and, after the sun had set, to drag her body by the hair over the scorched field. "Wherever my body has passed, new grass will arise," she told him. "When you glimpse my golden hair between the leaves, the grain will be good to eat."

The plant is as mysterious as the strange blonde. It is an annual grass, of unknown origin, with a unique dependence on humankind. Arranged in neat rows on each ear, and wrapped in a tight green sheath, the kernels, or seeds, cannot be spread by wind or birds. For thousands of years, beginning

boiled, roasted, or made into porridge." Already, corn was recognized as versatile, but nowhere did it assume as many guises as in the United States. The list reads like an honor roll of national and regional comfort foods: creamed corn, hush puppies, spoon bread, cornbread, corn pudding, succotash, corn on the cob, corn relish, corn chowder, corn fritters, hominy grits, cornmeal mush, corn sticks, corn muffins, corn dogs, johnnycakes, caramel corn, the New Mexico stew known as pozole, and last but by no means least, popcorn. Americans consume more of it than anyone—nearly 70 quarts per person every year.

Simply put, Americans have a taste for corn. Garrison Keillor may have put it best. "Sex is good," he said. "But not as good as fresh sweet corn."

William Grimes is the author of Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York (North Point; 2009).



MASSACHUSETTS
CORN MUFFINS

in Central America and moving northward until all of North America fell under its spell, corn has required human intervention to prosper.

Which it has. According to Christopher Columbus's journal, two of his men, pushing into the West Indies, found a city whose residents offered "a sort of grainlike millet, which they called maize, which it very well tasted when

Corn has been serious business in Massachusetts since the first Thanksgiving. In 1986, responding to a petition by schoolchildren, the legislature proclaimed the corn muffin the state's official muffin. Good choice. A descendant of johnnycakes and corn pone (a Southern style of corn bread), the classic corn muffin works equally well at breakfast, spread with jam, butter, or honey, above, or as a side dish at big American dinners.



SOUTH CAROLINA SHRIMP AND GRITS

No one knows exactly when fishermen from Charleston and the Low Country started eating shrimp and grits for breakfast. But we do know that the two ingredients have become one of the region's signature dishes. Now, of course, lunch and dinner are also considered prime time for the meal. This variation adds cheddar cheese and a robust sauce of bacon, onion, and bell pepper.



NEW MEXICO GREEN-CHILE POZOLE

This pre-Columbian Mexican dish, which gradually drifted northward to New Mexico, relies on hominy—dried kernels of corn boiled in water treated with slaked lime until they swell and the hulls and germs

can be removed. The hearty pork-and-hominy stew comes in red and green versions, depending on the chiles used. This green version, with tart tomatillos, gets its heat from jalapeños. It also makes lavish use of add-ons: avocado, sliced onion, cilantro, and limes.



ILLINOIS CARAMEL CORN

Popcorn vendors Frederick William Rueckheim and his brother Louis pulled out the stops for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. They unveiled their snack-food experiment: popcorn and peanuts coated in molasses. An instant hit, it quickly evolved into Cracker Jack. The homemade caramel corn here uses Beer Nuts for a rich, salty-sweet flavor. It's crisp and addictive.



ARKANSAS HUSH PUPPIES

In Arkansas, you eat biscuits with fried chicken and hush puppies with fried catfish. It's that simple, just like the recipe. The classic hush puppy is nothing more than a dollop of cornmeal batter perked up with a little cayenne and onion and deep-fried until crunchy on the outside and fluffy on the inside. The style varies: football-shaped, round like doughnut holes, or blunt-ended like cocktail franks. No matter the shape, they are one of the South's great side dishes.





TEXAS
CORN DOGS

Two brothers named Neil and Carl Fletcher introduced a newfangled snack at a fair in Dallas in 1942. The “corny dog” was a hot dog dipped in a sweet corn batter and then deep-fried and served on a skewer. You could add zing by twirling the tip in mustard. They have been selling in the hundreds of thousands at the Fletcher family’s corny dog stands every year since.

Created by James Dunlinson, Anna Kovel, and Michelle Wong

SEE RECIPES SECTION
SEE GUIDE FOR SOURCES

FOR MORE AMAZING CORN RECIPES, plus hundreds of seasonal goodies, check out our 60-day summer celebration center at marthastewart.com/summer-corn. Go online and share!