

SPOTLIGHT

Top of the pops!

Strawberry popcorn has a dwarf seed head that produces child-sized fruit, ideal for popping in the microwave. Here's a chance to grow your own English popcorn!

What fun! Strawberry corn, a miniature version of ordinary sweetcorn, produces an abundance of lovely 5cm ears of deep, ruby red-coloured fruit that are shaped like strawberries! They are ideal for making brilliant miniature popcorn, which if you eat without sugar or salt, have the tiniest hint of a strawberry flavour. They also make really interesting decorations, or dinner party gifts.

These plants are excellent for encouraging children in the garden because, not only are they very easy to grow and need little actual care, the colour, shape and size are unique. If you sow in mid-May they'll be still there after the school holidays, making them ideal subjects for classroom work – assuming we get a little rain in August.

The plant only grows to 1.25m making it ideal for a small garden, tubs or containers.

Sow in April under cover, preferably in a heated propagator set at 15°C. Use a good general-purpose compost and keep moist. Place two seeds into each pot and discard the smallest seedling once they are clearly established. A second sowing a month after the first can provide a later crop and this can be sown in an unheated propagator.

In late May, when there is no chance of a frost, you can plant the seedlings into their final positions. They like to be bunched together as does ordinary sweetcorn, around 40cm apart. If the weather is poor you can delay this until early June.

It's not so easy to determine ripeness with the strawberry corn as it is with sweetcorn. Normally you push your nail into one of the kernels on a cob, but these seeds are much smaller, so you have to judge by eye! The cobs are covered with papery leaves, and take around three to four months to produce, depending on your climate. Plants started in April in the north of the country should be ready by the end of August, a couple of weeks earlier in the south. It won't matter if you pick them a bit too early because as they can't be eaten like ordinary sweetcorn any lack of sweetness isn't the end of the world. When picked they should be hung in a dry, airy place and once dry treated as normal popcorn. ■

Above: 5cm ears of deep, ruby red-coloured fruit are both attractive and tasty.

Below: The cobs need to be naturally dried before they can be 'popped'.



Grow this unusual variety for less this summer!

Victoriana are offering our readers free postage on Strawberry Corn

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