



**A weekly question/answer column**

**How Many Ears Of Corn Grow On One Stalk?**

*Dan Drost\* answers:*

Ear number and size can vary greatly from cultivar to cultivar. Most sweet corn varieties will have one to two ears per plant because they are mature rapidly and are generally short statured plants.

- Early maturing sweet corn will have one ear while those that mature later have two harvestable ears. Commercial corn growers only harvest the first ear because the size and quality of the second ear is inferior. Ear quality (size, flavor, tip fill) depends on temperature during pollination, plant nutrition and water availability during ear growth.
- Field corn, which is used for corn oil, silage and corn flakes to name a few, generally has from one to two ears. Field corn contains high amounts of starch and low sugars so fresh eating quality is poor. Field corn can cross with sweet corn, making some of the sweet corn kernels starchy and flavorless. Ear size is larger than sweet corn since field corn grows taller and for a longer time.
- There are specific selections of field corn that produce six to ten ears per plant. These varieties were selected specifically for the production of baby corn which is used in stirfry and salad bars. Baby corn is harvested from regular corn plants when the ears are very immature. The ears are harvested one to three days after the silks emerge. At this early stage, yields are very low. Growers of baby corn use varieties that produce many ears or plant at very high numbers of plants. Since production costs are so high, very little baby corn is grown in the United States.

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