

Puttin' Up Freezer Corn:

By Steve Daut

One of the more vivid memories I have of my in-laws out at their country home in Iowa was the delicious corn we used to have with Thanksgiving dinner. They had a large garden, and I got to help them freeze it up a few times in late summer. I don't know why in the world I never did it when I lived in the city all those years, but now that we have a country place of our own it became a priority for me to rekindle that experience of sinking my teeth into that unmistakable buttery-sweet winter flavor as part of Thanksgiving. So in preparation for our own garden next year, we bought a half-bushel of corn and set to work with it.

Sue has a big canning pot so the corn was scalded in that. The books we looked at said to scald the corn for eight minutes, but that seemed like way too much. We thought maybe 3-4 but we didn't want to fight the "sage" advice from our cookbooks so we compromised on six minutes. That worked pretty well, but I'd probably cut it to five next year.

We boiled through the corn a dozen ears at a time and then shaved it off the cob using a sharp butcher knife. It's easiest to hold the cob straight up with the tip down and the stalk end up, then using a gentle sawing motion to get as much of those juicy golden kernels as possible. Once the first cut is made, I rotate the cob about 6-8 times so I'm slicing only a couple of rows off at a time, which keeps the kernels intact as far as possible. When the cob is done, I like to scrape it down with the back of the knife to get the rest of the juice and the germ, which is the bright yellow part at the center of the kernel and provides the oil and protein to complement the fiber and starch of the rest of the kernel.

Once all of the goodies are scraped off the cob, the cobs and husks go on the compost pile and the corn gets put into quart-sized zippered freezer bags. I like to press out as much air as I can before the final seal to prevent frosting up, but we don't use a vacuum sealer. I don't know if that would work better, so if anyone has experience trying it one way or another I'd like to hear about it. I think it's best if the corn goes in the freezer while it's still warm, but that could just be some prejudice I've developed from watching some big green guy in commercials talking about the benefits of flash freezing.

Now I'm anticipating the payoff at Thanksgiving. To complete my rekindled memory, the corn comes out of the bag into a small pan with a liberal amount of butter, some salt and pepper, and a touch of milk. After it thaws, it gets heated through and cooked for around 5 minutes, not too much. The result is like eating corn on the cob, fresh from the garden but with an extra touch of creamy smoothness from the milk and the scrapings off the cob. Just the thought of it takes me back to Iowa, those long lazy weekends floating down the Mississippi river on my in-laws house boat, and the big family Thanksgiving dinners we spent enjoying the bounty from their garden.