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As corn obsessives, the year's first ears at the market—good or bad—always come home with us. But what begins as a trickle soon swells, and after our fiendish cravings are sated, we can start to get choosy—searching for heavy weights, smooth green husks, and shiny kernels; signs of the freshest ears. And then, too, we get a little more inquisitive and creative with the ears in the kitchen. Lately, we've been tinkering with the big piles of compost our obsession gives us: The stacks of cobs, piles of husks, and tangles of silk. While the kernels may still be best for eating, it turns out all the other parts have something delicious to offer, too. Here are some of our favorite ways to get sweet flavor and fascinating textures out of them. Finally, you can be as corny as you wanna be!



Buttery Roast Chicken with Black Garlic

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people, these threads just kind of stick around annoyingly while you try to shuck. But it turns out that **frying the corn silk** produces a wonderful tangle of light crispness. Gather the light, clean corn silk from your shucking (cut off any brown ends). The trick is drying the strands completely in a dehydrator or a 175-200°F oven and then flash frying them at 400°F. If your oil isn't hot enough the silks will be stringy and tough, but at high heat they are crisp, delicate and delicious. We love using them to make nests, garnished with a variety of fresh herb leaves and cradling a soft-cooked egg. You could also use fried corn silk as a crunchy garnish to eat out of hand or over creamed corn. Or wrap them around shrimp as a seasonal twist on the cruise-ship classic, coconut shrimp.

- Taking a cue from tamales, where dried corn husks add a mysterious sweet, aromatic flavor to the filling, we like to shred the husks from several ears of corn and **make a thick bed in the roasting pan** for chicken, fish and vegetables, which perfumes the oven with a clean, grassy note. Be sure to discard the outermost layers as they tend to be dirty and just use the tender, inner leaves. Or try stuffing the cavity of fish with shredded corn husks before roasting or grilling.
- Another great, unexpected product is **husk butter**. We julienne fresh husks and cook them over medium-low heat in butter until lightly caramelized and the flavors infuse the butter. (Use 2 ears-worth for each ¼ pound of butter.) The mild sugar of the husks lends a warm toasty sweetness to the butter, and gives a grassy, corn-y note to the finish. We strain out the husks and use the butter to gently stew freshly scraped corn kernels for fresh polenta. Or we make a corn husk hollandaise and slather it on freshly grilled ears of corn. It also works beautifully in corn bread and—our favorite—blueberry corn muffins, both in the batter and slathered on top.
- In a similar vein, we also love **roasted husk-infused cream**. Lay the husks out on a sheet pan, in a layer 2-3 leaves thick, and roast them at 300°F for about an hour, stirring occasionally, until they turn a rich golden brown. Then take those roasted husks and steep them, covered, in barely-simmering sweet cream; we like to use 2 cups of roasted husks for every pint of cream for a delicate corn flavor that doesn't overwhelm. This cream can be used on its own or blended with sweet corn kernels for a more complex, layered flavor. We like it as the base for seafood and vegetarian chowders or as the base for corn puddings and ice creams.
- While you've got the oven on, you may want to make **roasted corn stock**. Roast corncobs—they take about 45 minutes at 350°F—and simmer them in water to cover for 20-30 minutes. To bump up the flavor, add roasted husks and the sweet corn silk and you will have a stock like none you've ever tasted before.
- Or you can **use corn cobs like wood chips for smoking**. Dry the cobs in a low oven (175-200°F) overnight or in a dehydrator for a few hours and use them in your smoker for a light, sweet smoke that's just awesome.



Aki Kamozaawa

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questions you ask, the better the food. Alex can be found at <http://www.ideasinfood.com>.

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