

LATE SUMMER CORN

We're almost to the end of the summer's corn harvest, but there is still some to be had at Sloughouse and in the stores. While nothing beats corn on the cob, (which by the way I cook in the microwave for 2 minutes an ear, each ear shucked and the silk removed and individually wrapped in plastic wrap), there are some delicious things you can do with corn to enjoy the last of the season. One of my favorites is corn chowder. While traditional corn chowders often call for bacon, here's a somewhat lighter version.

You'll need six ears of shucked corn, a large onion, peeled and chopped, a shallot, peeled and chopped, a pound of Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into half-inch cubes, a pint of cherry tomatoes cut in half, two garlic cloves, peeled and finely minced, half a lime, and about a quarter cup of chopped fresh basil.

Cut the corn off the cobs and place it into a large bowl. Then with the back of the knife, scrape the cobs to get off the rest of the pulp and add that to the bowl. Save the cobs. In a medium soup pot or Dutch oven, melt two tablespoons of butter (I use unsalted butter) over medium heat. Stir in the chopped onion, shallot and garlic, and cook, stirring from time to time, until softened, about five minutes. Then add 4 cups of chicken broth, the corn cobs, a cup of water, and a teaspoon of salt. Bring to the boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 10 minutes, uncovered.

Add the potatoes and simmer until the potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes. Remove the corn cobs with a pair of tongs and discard. Stir in the corn, pulp and the tomatoes. Add a few grinds of black pepper. Squeeze the lime into the soup and stir in the chopped basil. Taste for salt, and add a little more if needed. Turn off the heat, cover and let the soup sit for another 15 minutes to let the flavors fully blend before serving. For added richness you can add a dollop of sour cream to each serving. This will serve 4 generously. Some good bread and a green salad make this into a delicious light supper.

For a delicious corn stir fry, cut the kernels off four ears of corn and chop up five slices of bacon. Sauté the bacon over medium-high heat for about five minutes until crispy. Spoon off some of the bacon grease if there is too much. Add the corn and fry, stirring often, for about three minutes. While the corn is frying, chop a canned chipotle pepper in adobo. Add the pepper and a little of the adobo sauce if you like things very spicy, and a pinch of salt. Stir. Add a couple of tablespoons of water and loosen up any browned bits that have stuck to the pan. Simmer for a couple of minutes until thickened up and serve with some chopped cilantro.

For an old-fashioned corn bread, preheat your oven to 375 degrees. Cut the kernels off an ear of cooked corn. Then sift together in a large mixing bowl 1 cup of all-purpose flour, 1 cup stone-ground yellow cornmeal, 1 tablespoon of baking powder and ½ teaspoon of salt. In another bowl, whisk together 1 ¼ cups of sour cream or buttermilk with one egg, 3 tablespoons sugar, ¼ cup vegetable oil, and ¼ teaspoon baking soda.

Then fold the wet ingredients into the dry ones until just combined. Fold in the corn and about ¾ cup of crumbled farmer's cheese. I like to use the soft Mexican cotijo cheese which most supermarkets now carry. And you can add a couple of tablespoons of chopped fresh thyme for a delicious flavor.

In a 9-inch cast iron skillet, melt half a stick of butter over medium-high heat, tilting the pan to coat the bottom and sides completely. Let the butter cook for two to three minutes until it starts to turn a little brown and smell nutty. Scrape the batter into the skillet, smoothing the surface with a rubber spatula. Bake in your preheated 375 degree oven for 30 to 35 minutes, until a knife blade or toothpick inserted into the cornbread comes out clean. Let it cool for about 5 minutes, cut into wedges and serve.

So don't miss out on the last corn of the season. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.