

Let's Talk Corn

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Illinois...the Land of Lincoln and lots of corn! In 2020, Illinois ranked #2 in corn production in the U.S. exceeded only by our friends in Iowa. Our state's claim to fame is for field corn also called dent corn. It is exported to other countries, used to make ethanol and corn oil, and fed to animals.

But when August rolls around, my taste buds crave sweet corn! You cannot find a more midwestern treat than juicy corn on the cob. Whether you like it boiled or roasted, dripping with butter or not, sweet corn is an undeniable summer treat. Our state's specialty growers are hard at work to deliver corn to our local grocery stores and farmer's markets.

Illinois has another claim to fame...we rank 3rd in the country in popcorn production. Popcorn is also the official Illinois snack food! There is a little bit of water inside every kernel of popcorn to make it pop so perfectly!

So, if you are looking for some fun family activities in these final days of summer, check out how to make corn plastic with the kids.

Next time you are driving through the countryside, remember that in Illinois, corn is king!

CORN PLASTIC ACTIVITY

1. Place a tablespoon of cornstarch in a plastic zipper-seal bag.
2. Add 2 drops of corn oil to the cornstarch.
3. Add 1 ½ tablespoons of water to the oil and cornstarch. Seal the bag.
4. Mix the cornstarch, oil and water in the plastic bag by rubbing the outside of the bag with your fingers.
5. Add 2 drops of your favorite food coloring to the mixture and mix well. DO NOT completely seal the bag.
6. Place the bag in a microwave oven for 20-25 seconds on high. Be careful. It will be hot. Form your plastic into a ball while it is still warm and describe what it does.
7. Record your scientific observations.
 - What are the physical properties of your biodegradable plastic?
 - What could you make with this biodegradable corn plastic if you let it harden?
 - What will happen if you put the biodegradable plastic in water?

