

Nixtamalizing Corn



Check out the RoseRed Homestead video on How to Nixtamalize Dent Corn.
<https://youtu.be/hKRA0pePFwQ>

While this process takes hours to complete, it only takes about 15 minutes of your time per batch, which makes it very doable for those of us who have very busy lives. I can start a batch just before bedtime, turn off the heat and let it sit overnight, then spend about 10 minutes rinsing it the next morning. If I don't have time at that moment to grind it or dry it, I simply put it in a jar in the fridge until I do have time sometime in the next couple of days.

Corn that has been nixtamalized is called nixtamal or hominy.

There are many different recipes for nixtamalization and we have tried at least a dozen. The one below is our favorite because of the resulting taste and texture.

For this process you will need:

- 4 generous cups of dent corn—yellow, white, or any color
- 2 tablespoons of calcium hydroxide—I use Mrs. Wages Pickling Lime available on Amazon. Or you can find it sold as “Cal” in Mexican grocery stores.
- 1 gallon of water—use good water! If your tap water has an unpleasant taste, use bottled water.

Bring the water to a boil in a large non-reactive pot. Stir in the calcium hydroxide until dissolved. Once the water comes back to a boil, add the corn about a cup at a time and stir. Turn the heat down to a low simmer and place the lid partway on the pot and simmer for 60 minutes. Check and stir often. Remove several kernels from the pot and rinse thoroughly. Cut a kernel with a knife (or I just bite them!). If they are soft enough to cut with a little pressure, or are equivalent to “al dente”, they are done. If not, simmer an additional 15 minutes and test again. They should be done at this point. Turn off the heat, cover the pan and allow to soak overnight.

Using a non-reactive colander, drain the corn from the alkali solution and rinse thoroughly. Mix with your hand in the colander for several minutes as the water rinses through the corn. Place the corn back in the empty bowl, add water to cover, and manipulate the corn by rubbing handfuls together to loosen the outer covering. The water will look yellow and full of debris. Pour back into the colander to drain and rinse. Repeat this process until the water covering the corn in the bowl is clear when you swish the corn around. Drain the corn and either refrigerate or proceed with grinding or drying the corn.



If you prefer to nixtamalize your corn using bicarbonate of soda instead of pickling lime, the USDA has provided instructions for this alternative. It is part of their instructions for canning the nixtamal or hominy after nixtamalization. You can find those instructions here: https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/hominy_without_lye.html

What to Do with Nixtamal (Hominy)

If you have never tasted fresh nixtamal, especially when you have made it yourself, you are going to be amazed. It simply does not compare to anything else in terms of aroma, texture, and flavor. There is also a feeling of connection to the past and a sense of wonder about how it all came about that I find both compelling and intoxicating.

There are two pathways you can follow with fresh nixtamal—you can leave it fresh, or you can dry it for grinding.

Uses for Fresh Nixtamal

- Leave as is and use as you regularly use hominy—in soups, stews, casseroles, as a side dish, in salads and much more.
- Grind it in a wet grinder and make masa for making tortillas, tamales, tostadas, gorditas, and much more.

Uses for Dried Nixtamal

- Grind it in your grain mill as follows:
 - On fine setting for masa harina (corn flour)—you can then make masa for the same uses as fresh masa. You can also use it for breads, sauces or as a thickening agent for soups.
 - On medium course setting for grits or cornmeal—you can vary the degree of coarseness according to your taste. I like a fairly course grind for gorditas. For cornmeal, I vary the coarseness depending on how I plan to use it.

How to Dry Nixtamal

- Home dehydrator—Spread the kernels out in a single layer on the trays and process. I set the temperature for about 150°F, but it will dry under a wide range of temperatures. My dehydrator dries a large batch of nixtamal in about 8 hours, but times will vary.
- Oven—Spread kernels on a baking sheet in a single layer and place in your oven on the lowest setting. Check and stir the kernels about every 30 minutes until they are completely dry.