

She's Milling Corn Mexican Style

Alondra Cano wants to adapt Mexican corn varieties to the Midwest to recreate the fresh masa that is her cultural heritage. Masa is a dough or flour made from corn that has been softened by soaking in alkali (a process called nixtamalization) and then finely ground. It's used to make tortillas, tamales and other Latin American foods. As a first step, she's working with existing heirloom corn varieties already found in the U.S.

"We're growing five different varieties and testing them for flavor, hardness and susceptibility to disease," says Cano. "We're also looking at the nutritional profile to compare it with the masa harina (masa flour) available in Latin markets and food sections of supermarkets. Most of it comes from conventional field corn raised in the Midwest."

As a farmer education specialist with Marbleseed, formerly MOSES, Cano works with regenerative and organic farmers in the Midwest. However, her Mexican-style corn variety research is based at Hungry Turtle Farm near Amery, Wis.

This past season was Cano's first year planting corn seed provided by various heirloom seed savers/producers. "We waited a month after sweet corn and field corn had been planted in the area to prevent cross-pollination," says Cano. "The heirloom corn was easy to maintain. By early fall, it looked good, and we harvested some, prepared it and had a dinner based on it. We were excited to taste it."

Nixtamalizing the corn to make masa is critical. Typically, a small amount of calcium hydroxide is added to the corn and water. This is brought to a boil, let sit, drained and rinsed. At this point, the corn is called nixtamal and is ready to be ground, either wet as it is or dried first and then ground and used like conventional cornmeal.

"In Latin cultures, it's more likely to be used as wet corn, boiled with other ingredients and then ground," says Cano. "The colors at that point vary according to the dry kernels' appearance. They can be white



Cano Wachichu, a Lakota/Dakota flint corn.

or yellow, blue or purple and even red, pink or brown."

Once Cano identifies preferred varieties, she plans to introduce them and promote the nixtamal process to the marketplace. At the same time, she'll need to work with farmers to grow the heirloom corn and achieve a scale or volume significant enough to compete with commercial products. The challenge is to build a market and match it to production at the same time.

"We've been contacting restaurants and identifying those who will sign a contract with us and establish how much they'll need," says Cano. "We're working with many farmers locally and, at the same time, looking at how we can import seed from Mexico to adapt to the Midwest."

Cano is confident that her corn will be welcomed by consumers and restaurateurs alike. The early fall dinner was proof for her. "There isn't a sugary pop," says Cano. "The intensity of the product is so beautiful. When you eat it, you feel full, with a grounded, earthy feeling."

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Henley restored his Ford 9N aluminum hood tractor, receiving a perfect score at the Early Ford Dearborn Show.



9N Ford Restored To 'Perfection'

Illinois Ford tractor enthusiast Don Henley restored his rare 1939 model 9N Ford tractor to what he can honestly call "perfection." That distinction has been verified three times because the tractor received 1,000 out of 1,000 possible points each time it was displayed at the Early Ford V-8 Club national show in Dearborn, Mich.

Henley's masterpiece is a rare aluminum hood model, serial number 9N 577. Henry Ford built about 600 of the aluminum hood models because he didn't have time to stamp out steel hoods and have them ready for the 1939 New York World's Fair. The aluminum hood models were bought for farm use and are now a rare find for collectors. Only about 40 are registered with the Ford Tractor Collector's Club.

The original selling price of a 9N was \$585. Enthusiasts now pay thousands more to buy one if they can find one. Henley pursued this specific 9N tractor for nearly 20 years before

finally acquiring it. Then, he spent hundreds of hours doing a frame-off restoration. Every possible part was removed, cleaned, restored and put back in place. He says that cosmetically and mechanically, the tractor is indeed perfect.

Perhaps more astounding is that this is the second aluminum hood model he's worked on. Though he values every tractor in his collection, after many hours of personal deliberation, he decided to sell 577. It was a showpiece item at the fall 2024 Aumann Rest-O-Original Auction.

Henley says it was bittersweet, for sure, but since he had another one, it was time to let someone else appreciate 577. The selling price was \$59,400, which didn't surprise Henley. It's tough to put a price on perfection, but that's what it was in the case of this great tractor.

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How To Grow Lemon Trees In Containers

Don't let your growing zone limit your choices. You can enjoy fresh citrus from home by growing a lemon tree in a portable container.

Technically, any citrus tree can grow in a container. However, it's hard to keep full-sized orange or grapefruit trees alive. The compactness of lemon trees makes them an easier choice, especially when the goal is fruit production. Still, you'll do best with dwarf varieties. Consider "Improved Meyer," "Eureka" or "Ponderosa." For less common fruits, consider kumquats or kefir limes, valued for their aromatic leaves.

The first step is finding a suitable pot. Start with a pot on the smaller side to better maintain the soil moisture level. A new tree can handle an 8-in. dia. pot, while one that's 3 years old should have at least 12 in. For long-term growth, stick with a pot that's at least 16 to 20 gal.

Any standard pot with drainage holes should work. Plastic is the most lightweight option, making it well-suited for moving the plant frequently. Terracotta is also popular, but remember that the porous material can draw out water. This is especially problematic if the tree is older. A glazed pot creates a more solid barrier between the water and the world, slowing the evaporation rate and reducing watering frequency.

Citrus does best with deep but infrequent watering. Put your finger in the soil; if it's dry 6 in. down, you're due for another watering. Waiting until the leaves are wilting puts the tree under unnecessary stress. Once or twice weekly is usually enough, though the frequency can increase in the summer.

Consider your potting mix carefully. One recommendation is to use a 1:1:1 ratio of horticultural grit, loam and leaf mold. This allows for complete water permeation without soggy soil that leads to root rot. Commercial potting mixes with peat moss, perlite or vermiculite also work, and supplementing with compost will improve the nutrient profile.

You'll want to ensure the tree gets plenty of sun, so seek a south-facing or west-facing location that's sunny but sheltered. Heat is



New trees can use a smaller pot but eventually need a pot of at least 16 to 20 gal.

appreciated; laundry rooms tend to be ideal. Bring the tree outdoors on sunny days, but avoid too much rain exposure. Your lemon tree belongs indoors once the temperature dips into the 30's.

Even indoor trees require some maintenance in the spring. Add citrus plant food to the base—focusing on extra nitrogen. Prune any new shoots growing from below the graft union and trim branches that make the center too dense. The goal is to maintain lots of airflow. This aids flower production, which eventually leads to fruit. Consider trimming off half-grown stems and all but a few flowers to ensure the tree puts as much energy as possible into producing big, beautiful lemons.

While pest problems tend to be minimal, you can control aphids and mealybugs by hand-picking them or using an insecticidal soap.

Though you can't necessarily expect a bumper crop of lemons off an indoor tree, growing one in a container is a rewarding experience that will brighten your home and maybe give you a few fruits.

Lemon trees are available at many nurseries or home and garden centers.

How To Make Salve From Pine Needles

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

If you're willing to forage and cook, you may find relief for dry winter skin in a nearby forest. Pine trees have a long tradition of being natural healers, and several websites and YouTube videos focus on recipes and techniques for using pine needles, resin and other parts of the tree.

While most pine varieties (except for yew) are considered safe, the Christmas tree you just recycled likely wasn't a good choice as it may have been sprayed with chemicals. It's best to gather natural ingredients.

A good description and recipes for the process can be found at www.growforagecookferment.com.

For the salve, begin by infusing needles to make a pine oil.

Cut dry needles into 1-in. pieces and cover with olive oil (1 cup needles to 1 1/2 cups oil). Adding a tablespoon of castor oil is optional. Let it set one to six weeks in a cool place like a pantry. Or, for a quicker (but less potent) method, put it in a pot and heat it on low heat for up to 12 hours. Strain out the needles and put the remaining pine-infused oil in a double boiler with beeswax. The ratio is 1 oz. beeswax to 1 cup oil. A couple of drops



Beeswax and pine oil make a salve that can moisturize skin.

of pine, fir or spruce essential oil can also be added.

Heat until the wax completely melts, and pour into tins or jars. Let it set undisturbed for several hours to create a salve that helps relieve dry and chapped skin.

Other methods for using pine resin to make salves can also be found online.