

Baby corn – An important component of urban and peri-urban horticulture

MAIZE (*Zea mays* L.) is a staple food in several parts of the world. It has been widely consumed as a vegetable in the form of baby corn which consists of unfertilized young, finger-long ears harvested 2 or 3 days after the emergence of silk.

Baby corn is highly nutritious and its nutritional value is equal to or greater than many vegetables such as tomato, cabbage, lettuce, carrot, colocasia, radish cucumber, bitter gourd brinjal, etc. Baby corn may be consumed as raw or used as an ingredient in various preparations like soups, deep fried with meat or rice, cooked with other vegetables, pickles, etc. As the green cobs are harvested within a week of silk emergence, baby corn becomes relatively free from pesticide residues. Short crop duration of baby corn makes it the best component of multiple cropping systems. More significantly, for farmers, both national and foreign markets have high value and demand for baby corn. In addition, for feeding ruminants and swine, husk, silk, and stover may be used as green fodder. High demand in hotel industry, short duration of the crop, multiple harvests in short duration, source of green fodder, etc make baby corn an important component in urban and peri-urban horticulture.



Baby corn fingers and cobs

In general, the baby corn cultivation is similar to that of traditional maize cultivation, but it differs with respect to cultivar preference, plant population, recommended dose of fertilizer, harvesting and detassling. Vivek Hybrid 27 and HM-4 are single cross hybrids released through AICRP-Maize for baby corn cultivation. Baby corn sowing can be done round the year in southern part of India and from February to November in northern part of India. If baby corn has to be raised in December to January time, growing nursery in November and translating in January is recommended. Depending on test weight of the cultivar seed rate per hectare varies from 23-26 kg. Depending on soil and cultivar, spacing between the plants may vary between 15 to 20 cm. Between rows 60 cm spacing is recommended. Ridge and furrow method of sowing as field corn can be practiced. Sowing on the ridges during monsoon season and sowing in furrows during winter season is advisable to protect seedling from heavy rains and frost, respectively.

Scheduling irrigation during young seedlings, knee high stage, silking and picking stages improves yield and quality of baby corn. Nutrient application should be followed based on soil test. Dose of fertilizers also varies from cultivar to cultivar. However, for general purpose per hectare 8-10 tonne farm yard manure, 150, 60, 60 and 25 kg/ha NPK and ZnSO_4 may be recommended. In this, full dose of P, K, Zn and 10% N has to be applied as basal dose during field preparation. Remaining N has to be applied in split as top dress as: 20% N at 4 leaf stage; 30% N at 8 leaf stage; 25% N before detasseling and 15% N after detasseling.

It is one of the important operations in baby corn production. The timely operation will help to produce good quality baby corn. Detasseling involves removal of tassel from plant before pollen shedding and improves quality of baby corn. While detasseling, care must be taken to avoid injury to top leaves. Removed tassels are highly nutritious and can be used as fodder for livestock.

To get good quality baby corn, harvesting has to be done 1-3 days after silk emergence. Preferably harvesting has to be done either during morning or at evening to protect moisture loss from baby corn due to high ambient temperature. Peeling the baby corn on the same day and storing in a cool and dry place to maintain its quality for long period is advisable.

For further interaction, please write to:

Suresh Reddy Yerasu (Scientist), ICAR-IIVR, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh 221 305. *Corresponding author email: Yerasu.Reddy@icar.gov.in