

# What's Up with My Corn?

*Pollen, fungus, and birds...oh my!*

Like all fresh produce, sweet corn is susceptible to damage and deformities from several types of pests and diseases. To combat this, at Snyder's Sweet Corn we have a multi-step sorting process, and we put fourteen cobs in our dozens to help make sure you get at least twelve excellent cobs! However, if some oddities have snuck into your purchase, this page will help you identify what is up with your funky-looking corn. We hope you find this info interesting!

## #1: Bird Damage

Our beautiful – but pesky! – feathered friends enjoy sweet corn almost as much as our customers do! Birds will slice or peck into the cob while it is on the stalk, eating the top few kernels and then moving on to the next cob. Most of the time, we can feel or see bird damage while we are sorting the corn. However, despite our efforts, some damaged cobs can slip through into your order. The damaged part does not affect the rest of the cob, so you can cut off the tip and cook the rest like normal :)



## #2: Corn Smut

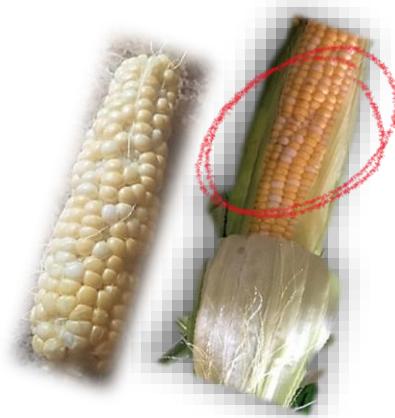
*(Ustilago maydis)*

Corn smut is a funky-looking fungus that is not harmful to humans. In fact, smut is cooked and eaten as a delicacy called *huitlacoche* in Mexico! Our goal is to sort out corn smut, as it is not considered quite as much of a delicacy here in Canada. However, it can really nestle itself into the cob and be hard to find,

which is why you sometimes see it! If it doesn't cause you great offence, you can cut the affected part off the cob and enjoy the rest...or if you're feeling adventurous you could find a recipe for *huitlacoche* and let us know how it tastes!

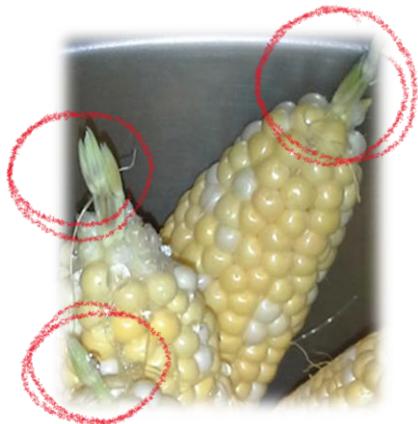
## #3: Mis-pollination

Corn plants are self-pollinating. The tassel at the top of the stalk contains millions of grains of pollen, and hair-like silks on the cob are each connected to a single kernel. During pollination, the silk is sticky, and pollen grains will drift down and latch onto every strand. However, if any of the silk is missing or broken during this time, the kernel attached to it will not grow into the delightful pocket of sweetness we desire!



#### #4: Tip-Back

Tip-back is caused by drought – not necessarily a wide-spread drought, but lack of adequate moisture for a single plant. The plant does not have enough water or energy to plump up all of the kernels. Instead of sacrificing the whole cob, the plant downsizes! It puts all of its energy and resources into a smaller section of the cob. So, the tip ends up withered, but the rest of the cob is sweet and delightful! You can cut off the withered tip, or cook it like it is and use the tip as a handle while you eat your cob!



#### #5: Tassel Tip

Tassel tip means that this plant was an overachiever! The plants that grew these cobs had so much extra energy that once they finished sweetening and plumping up the kernels, they tried to grow a whole new plant on the cob! However, this is not actually how corn works. The plant just doesn't understand that it can't grow a new plant from the cob – it needs to start from seed. The mini tassel isn't harmful to you or the rest of the cob; it just looks odd :) You can cut it off before you cook it, or, like the tip-back cobs, you could leave it on and use it as a handy little handle!

#### #6: Aphid Damage

*(Sap-sucking insects)*

Aphids are tiny soft-bodied insects that feed on corn plants by piercing the leaves, stalks, and tassels to drink plant sap. They often appear in clusters and can build up quickly during warm, dry summer weather. While small, heavy infestations can stress the plant and create sticky messes on the leaves and husks. Common signs of aphid damage include sticky, shiny coating on leaves or husks (called honeydew) that sometimes darkens with age and can leave the leaves appearing dried out and brown. They may cause cosmetic messiness — but the cob is still perfectly safe to eat once husked and rinsed.



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While these odd cobs can be annoying, we think that the ways corn reacts to stressful situations *and* excellent growing conditions is absolutely fascinating! Thank you for learning with us, and we hope you enjoy your corn!

◦◦◦ *Snyder's Sweet Corn Family & Crew* ◦◦◦