

[< back to articles](#)

## Gardening tip – quick answer about corn earworms

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Hello gardener friends!

A few folks have asked me how my home grown garden ears of corn turn out so good. The answer is really easy. There's nothing more frustrating in growing garden corn than to open the ears when ready to serve on the dinner table, only to find that those darn earworms have decimated the ear of corn eating anywhere from 25% - 50% of it.

First of all --- where do those pesky worms (like caterpillars) come from? They come from a moth that lays its eggs in the corn silks. [silks are not the corn tassels at the top of the stalk] It is possible to use insecticide to take care of the problem, but it can be handled organically with great success. However, the timing in using this method is critical.

When I first found out about this, the standard method was to apply mineral oil to the silks, which does work. Explanation: When the ears of corn shoot out the silks from the top of each ear, apply (using a dropper, or t-spoon) about a half t-spoon of the oil exactly at the top of the ear where the silk meets the ear. When the worm larvae travels down the silk to enter the ear it gets caught up in the oil which "drowns" them and impedes their further travel into the ear. This has been the standard procedure for a long time to deal with the corn worm situation. Note >>> the time to apply the oil is important. Wait until the top of the silk has turned brown (or red brown) about 1/3 down the way of the silk from the top end. If you wait too long the worms have already gotten into the corn.

However, by experimenting on my own, an easier but still effective method is to spray olive oil where the silk and ear meet and it works as good as the mineral oil. Its a lot faster and neater. You can buy an aerosol spray bottle of olive oil at the grocery store. Just spray one side of the silk with a "squirt" then fold the silk open and spray the center, then flip it over and spray the other side. This really saturates the silk properly more so than trying to use the mineral oil and a t-spoon. I've had a near 100% success rate with this method which I've been using for several years. If the corn earworm moth would have a really prolific year maybe the success rate would dip a bit, but I haven't had that problem yet. You can mark each ear of corn that is treated with a baggie tie or a dab of white-out since new ears will appear at different times. That's about all to this "trick" so good gardening to y'all and enjoy the corn! --- Ken