

THE FORAGER

Agronomics with livestock in mind!

PLANTING CORN NOW? DON'T JUMP THE GUN WITH COOL, WET SPRING WEATHER!

With snow still falling in parts of the country, and frost still in the ground in most parts of more northern states, many farmers are raising the question "When should I think about planting corn this year?"

With this year's cold and wet spring conditions, many farmers are facing a certain degree of uncertainty as to when they should start planting corn fields, says University of Illinois Natural Resources Educator Bob Frazer in a university report.

Begin planting too early and the corn seedlings may get injured or killed by frost, perhaps necessitating replanting of the field. Plant too late.... and the corn may pollinate in late-July or August when it is often very hot and dry, resulting in yield reductions.

Soil and weather conditions differ from year to year, but university agronomists feel that with typical spring weather, preparation for corn planting can begin sometime in the first half of April for most areas. Delays due to low soil temperature (below 50°F) should be considered only if the weather outlook is for continued cold air temperatures. After April 20, soil temperature should be ignored as a factor, and corn should be planted as soon as soil conditions allow.

Thus, in most years, anytime after April 15 is not too early for farmers in northern states to start planting corn. However, Frazer cautions, the weather in your area during the first two weeks of April will be critical in determining whether this planting date should be delayed for seven to ten days this year. These dates assume that the soil is dry enough to support the equipment for seedbed preparation and planting without causing soil compaction. University research shows that when planting begins in April, it is generally best to plant very full-season hybrids first.

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Based on university research from throughout the Midwest, planting corn early offers the following significant advantages:

- The corn plant develops better and has a higher yield potential when the vegetative period of its development occurs in the cooler, moister weather of May and June.
- Earlier planting tends to place the tasselling and silking period ahead of mid-July weather, where there is greatest risk of moisture and drought stress.
- Early planted fields have a deeper root system by late June/early July, enabling plants to access available subsoil water when summer drought arrives.
- The earlier the corn pollinates, the greater the solar energy available during kernel development.
- Early planted corn is usually shorter, has lower ear height, and less lodging.
- Early planting of properly chosen hybrids leads to earlier maturity, which results in less damage from early frost, less lodging, and more efficient harvesting.
- Early maturity means less drying cost.

Planting times will vary depending on your specific geographic location. Consult your local extension or university agriculture office for more details regarding recommendations for planting times.

(Edited from an article by the University of Illinois and AGRICULTURE ONLINE)

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