

# When To Plant Corn This Year

**URBANA, ILL.**

**W**ith nighttime temperatures in the 20's and most soils still completely saturated in most parts of Illinois the last week of March, many farmers are raising the question "WHEN should I think about planting corn this year?" With this year's abnormally cold and wet spring conditions, many farmers are facing a certain degree of uncertainty as to when should they start planting their cornfields, reports Bob Frazee, University of Illinois Natural Resources Educator.

Begin planting too early and the corn seedlings may get injured or killed by frost, perhaps necessitating replanting of the field. Plant too late, Frazee cautions, and the corn may pollinate in late-July or August when it is often very hot and dry, resulting in yield reductions. Last year, due to excessive rainfall, many farmers planted their corn several weeks later than normal, but experienced some of their highest corn yields ever due to excellent growing conditions throughout the season. However, Frazee cautions that this is usually not the case.

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. Delays due to low soil temperature (below 50 degrees 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 Illinois to start plant-

ing corn. However, Frazee 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.

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 or early July which enables the plants to have subsoil water available 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.      Δ