

Three Sisters Garden

The heirloom seed packet in your kit is from the Agriculture in the Classroom program in New Hampshire. The Agricultural Literacy Curriculum Matrix includes directions for planting these seeds, as well as various versions of the Three Sisters story. Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom and the National Gardening Association have contributed to the creation of these materials. The text on this page is reproduced from this associated website:

<https://www.agclassroom.org/teacher/matrix/lessonplan.cfm?lpid=297>



In-Ground Garden:

1. Once the ground has thawed in the spring and the danger of frost has passed, select a site that has direct sunlight for at least 8 hours a day.
2. Build a small mound of soil about 12 inches high and 3 feet in diameter. If you have space for multiple mounds, each mound should be 3 to 4 feet apart in all directions.
3. Soak 4 to 7 corn seeds overnight and then plant them about 6 inches apart in the center of each mound. (You'll eventually thin to 3 or 4 seedlings.) Many Native people honor the Four Directions by orientating corn seeds to the north, south, east, and west.
4. After about 2 weeks, when the corn is at least 4 inches high, soak and then plant 6 pole bean seeds in a circle about 6 inches away from the corn. (You'll eventually thin to 3 or 4 seedlings.) At the same time, plant 4 squash or pumpkin seeds next to the mound, about a foot away from the beans, eventually thinning to one.
5. Maintain your Three Sisters garden. As plants grow, gently weed around them. Make sure the soil is moist. If beans aren't winding their way around the corn, move tendrils to the corn stalk. Be sure to thin the plants once they are several inches tall—see steps 3 and 4 for the ideal number of plants.
6. Harvest any fruits that have been produced in the fall.

The Three Sisters—An Akwesasne Mohawk Story

The following story, “The Three Sisters,” was recorded from an oral account by Lois Thomas of Cornwall Island, Canada, and originally published in *Indian Legends of Eastern Canada* (Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1969).

Once upon a time very long ago, there were three sisters who lived together in a field. These sisters were quite different from one another in their size and also in their way of dressing. One of the three was a little sister, so young that she could only crawl at first, and she was dressed in green. The second of the three wore a frock of bright yellow, and she had a way of running off by herself when the sun shone and the soft wind blew in her face. The third was the eldest sister, standing always very straight and tall above the other sisters and trying to guard them. She wore a pale green shawl, and she had long, yellow hair that tossed about her head in the breezes.

There was only one way in which the three sisters were alike. They loved one another very dearly, and they were never separated. They were sure that they would not be able to live apart.

After a while a stranger came to the field of the three sisters, a little Indian boy. He was as straight as an arrow and as fearless as the eagle that circled the sky above his head. He knew the way of talking to the birds and the small brothers of the earth, the shrew, the chipmunk, and the young foxes. And the three sisters—the one who was just able to crawl, the one in the yellow frock, and the one with the flowing hair—were very much interested in the little Indian boy. They watched him fit his arrow in his bow, saw him carve a bowl with his stone knife, and wondered where he went at night.

Late in the summer of the first coming of the Indian boy to their field, one of the three sisters disappeared. This was the youngest sister in green, the sister who could only creep. She was scarcely able to stand alone in the field unless she had a stick to which she clung. Her sisters mourned for her until the fall, but she did not return.

Once more the Indian boy came to the field of the three sisters. He came to gather reeds at the edge of a stream nearby to make arrow shafts. The two sisters who were left watched him and gazed with wonder at the prints of his moccasins in the earth that marked his trail.

That night the second of the sisters left, the one who was dressed in yellow and who always wanted to run away. She left no mark of her going, but it may have been that she set her feet in the moccasin tracks of the little Indian boy.

Now there was but one of the sisters left. Tall and straight she stood in the field, not once bowing her head with sorrow, but it seemed to her that she could not live there alone. The days grew shorter and the nights were colder. Her green shawl faded and grew thin and old. Her hair, once long and golden, was tangled by the wind. Day and night she sighed for her sisters to return to her, but they did not hear her. Her voice when she tried to call to them was low and plaintive like the wind.

But one day when it was the season of the harvest, the little Indian boy heard the crying of the third sister who had been left to mourn there in the field. He felt sorry for her, and he took her in his arms and carried her to the lodge of his father and mother. Oh what a surprise awaited her there! Her two lost sisters were there in the lodge of the little Indian boy, safe and very glad to see her. They had been curious about the Indian boy, and they had gone home with him to see how and where he lived. They had liked his warm cave so well that they had decided, now that winter was coming on, to stay with him. And they were doing all they could to be useful.

The little sister in green, now quite grown up, was helping to keep the dinner pot full. The sister in yellow sat on the shelf drying herself, for she planned to fill the dinner pot later. The third sister joined them, ready to grind meal for the Indian boy. And the three were never separated again.

Every child of today knows these sisters and needs them just as much as the little Indian boy did. For the little sister in green is the bean. Her sister in yellow is the squash, and the elder sister with long flowing hair of yellow and the green shawl is the corn.