

Three Sisters Garden

One of the best ways to get children interested in history is to bring it into the present. When teaching children about Native Americans in U.S. history, an excellent project is to grow the three Native American sisters, beans, corn and squash. When you plant a three sisters garden, you help to bring an ancient culture to life. Let's look at growing corn with squash and beans.

The story of the three Native American sisters

The three sisters way of planting originated with the Haudenosaunee tribe. The story goes that beans corn and squash are actually three Native American maidens. The three, while very different, love each other very much and thrive when they are near each other.

It is for this reason that the Native Americans plant the three sisters together.

Tips on how to plant a three sisters garden

First, decide on a location. Like most vegetable gardens, the three Native American sisters garden will need direct sun for most of the day and a location that drains well.

Next, decide on which plants you will be planting. While the general guideline is beans, corn and squash, exactly what kind of beans, corn and squash you plant is up to you.

For the beans, you will need a pole bean variety. Bush can be used, but pole beans are more true to the spirit of the project. Some good varieties are Kentucky Wonder, Romano Italian and Blue Lake beans.

The corn will need to be a tall, sturdy variety. You do not want to use a miniature variety. The kind of corn is up to your own taste. You can grow the sweet corn that we commonly find in the home garden today, or you can try a more traditional maize corn, such as Blue Hopi, Rainbow or Squaw corn. For extra fun, you can use a popcorn variety too. The popcorn varieties are still true to Native American tradition and fun as well.

The squash should be a vining squash and not a bush squash. Typically, winter squash work best. The traditional choice would be a pumpkin, but you can also do spaghetti, butternut or any other vine growing winter squash that you would like. Once you have chosen your beans corn and squash varieties, you can plant them in the chosen location. Build a mound that is 3 feet across and around a foot high.

The corn will go in the center. Plant 6 or 7 corn seeds in the center of each mound. Once they have sprouted, thin to just 4.

Two weeks after the corn has sprouted, plant 6 – 7 bean seeds in a circle around the corn about 6 inches away from the corn. When these sprout, also thin them to just 4.

Last, at the same time as you plant the beans, also plant the squash. Plant 2 squash seeds and thin to 1 when they sprout. The squash seeds will be planted on the edge of the mound, about a foot away from the bean seeds.

As your plants grow, gently encourage them to grow together. The squash will grow around the base, while the beans will grow up the corn.

A three Native American sisters garden is a great way to get kids interested in history and gardens. Growing corn with squash and beans is not only fun, but educational too.