

THREE SISTERS



The Three Sisters, known as Deohako (“the Life Sustainers”), form the basis of traditional Haudenosaunee agriculture and diet. There are several origin stories of the Three Sisters, one of which tells of three sisters named **Corn, Beans, and Squash**. The youngest dressed in green and could only crawl, the second wore a yellow dress and loved to run, and the oldest had long yellow hair and stood tall, protecting her sisters. As time passed, the sisters became separated from each other, but were reunited during the harvest season. Another account traces the origin of the Three Sisters to the Haudenosaunee creation story. Sky Woman fell from the Sky World and landed on the back of a giant turtle, where she spread soil to create land.

Sky Woman gave birth to a daughter, who grew up and died while giving birth. From the daughter’s grave grew the Three Sisters. Both origin stories emphasize the physical and spiritual sustenance of the Three Sisters as well as the sustaining role of Haudenosaunee women in supporting Haudenosaunee society.



THREE SISTERS GARDEN

The ‘Three Sisters Garden’ is the tradition of planting of corn, beans, and squash together. When planted together, the three plants prevent weeds and pests, enrich the soil, and support each other - resulting in better yields at harvest. In contrast to today's standard agricultural practice of planting single rows of a single vegetable, this method of interplanting introduces biodiversity, which does many things, from attracting pollinators to making the land richer instead of stripping it of nutrients. The Three Sisters planting method has been, and continues to be, used by Indigenous communities across the Americas.

Sources

McGurry, Renée. “The Three Sisters: Corn, Beans and Squash.” *First Nations in Treaty 2 Territory - Treaty 2 Territory Government*, 7 May 2021, <http://fnt2t.com/index.php/2021/05/07/the-three-sisters-corn-beans-and-squash/>.

Three Sisters. *The History Center in Tompkins County*, 2021, <https://thehistorycenter.net/resources/Documents/Learning%20Materials%20and%20Scans/Wampum%20Write-ups%20-%202021/Three%20Sisters%20Write%20up.pdf>.