

Relational Gardening

The Three Sisters

The Three Sisters are corn, beans, and squash. They are sometimes referred to as *tyonnhékhwen* (the food plants, life sustainers) in Kanyen'kéha (Mohawk). The Haudenosaunee have planted these crops together for millennia. Each of the sisters play a distinctive role in helping to ensure the health of the garden and the community. As they grow together, they provide each other with many gifts, and only a few are mentioned here. There are many stories and teachings connected to the Three Sisters, and from a Haudenosaunee perspective, their relationship teaches us about balance, reciprocity, gratitude and interconnectedness.

Corn - Ó:nenhste

Corn is the first sister to emerge from the ground and grows straight and strong. Its stiff stem must grow tall quickly, to support the beans as they begin to grow around it. This sister makes the sunlight more available for the other sisters.

Beans - Oshahè:ta

Beans are the second sister to grow. They begin growing leaves low to the ground, but “around the time that the corn is knee high, [they change their mind]“ (Kimmerer, 2013), and extend into a long vine which wraps around the corn in an upward spiral. This sister helps bring nitrogen from the air, into the soil, which helps the other sisters grow.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). Braiding Sweetgrass. First Edition. Milkweed Editions, p. 132.

Squash - Onon'onsera

Squash is the last to grow and moves away from the corn and beans. This sister spreads along the earth and grows prickly leaves, which protects the plants from being eaten by animals. Their leaves also shade the soil, which keeps it from drying out and reduces the risk of droughts.

All Information provided by the Queen's University Indigenous Land-based Learning STEM (QUILLS) program. Visit <https://elbowlakecentre.ca/education/quills-program/> to learn more.

Planting Ó:nenhste

Find the right soil!

Corn loves to be planted in a spot with full sun and in well-drained soil. Plant in late April to early May!

Plant the seeds!

Plant the seeds in holes that are 1.5 - 2 inches deep, and 2-4 inches apart. Form blocks of seeds, instead of single rows. Reflect on what you can say to the corn as you are planting the seeds.

Water and reflect!

What else does corn need to grow?
Who can help the corn grow?
How can you give thanks to the corn?

These are very limited instructions for planting. Please refer to more online resources about how to plant in a good way, and reflect on how to have a respectful relationship with each plant.

**Stop by the LDSB booth to
get a Packet of seeds!**