



Camp Ah-Ha Native American Gardens

Learn how you can make a
Native American Garden in your own backyard

Who: You and your family

What:

- Now that it is spring it is a perfect time to start thinking about planting a garden.
- Do you have a garden at home? What kinds of plants do you grow?
- Northwest Ohio is a great place to garden and farm. You don't have to drive too far to see acres of fields. Today farmers plant a lot of corn, soybeans and wheat.
- Did you know that Northwest Ohio was once a thick wooded forest? For centuries it has been home to Native Americans known as the Woodland Indians. Many different tribes made up the Woodland Indians like Iroquois, the Miami, the Wyandot, the Erie and the Potawatomi.
 - These Native peoples not only were excellent hunters, they were also excellent farmers. They would clear parts of the land of trees and plant crops. They didn't plant large acres of crops like the farms we see today. Instead, they would plant around the stumps of the trees they had cut down.
- These natives planted something called a "Three Sister Garden". The three sisters are actually corn, beans and squash.
- The term "Three Sisters" comes from an Iroquois legend. According to the legend, corn, beans and squash are inseparable sisters that were given to the people by the "Great Spirit."
- This type of gardening though had been going on for perhaps thousands of years and had been passed down

among Native Peoples throughout the North and South American Continents.

- When you see corn fields today, how do they look? Probably long straight rows!
- A Three Sister garden is planted in mounds with all three seeds planted together.
- The three plants help each other! The Corn grows tall and provides a support for the beans as they climb up, so you don't need a pole for them. The beans put nitrogen back into the soil which is an important nutrient for all plants. The squash with its big leaves grows along the base and provides shade for the roots which keeps in moisture, blocks sun which keeps weeds from growing and as the squash leaves die off, they become compost for the soil.



- Did you know you can grow a Three Sister Garden yourself?

How:

- First decide where you are going to plant your garden. You will need a space that is at least two feet in diameter. Four feet is even better. Look for a nice sunny spot.
- If this is a brand-new garden area, you'll want to remove the grass and dig up the soil and add compost and fertilizer to prepare it for gardening. (did you know Native People would sometimes plant a dead fish in the mound to act as fertilizer?) Here are a few websites to help you with that:

<https://www.bhg.com/gardening/yard/garden-care/ten-steps-to-beginning-a-garden/>

<https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-start-a-garden-from-scratch-2132778>

<https://extensionpubs.osu.edu/grow-your-own-vegetables/>

- Once you have your garden soil ready, you'll want to create a flat mound about 10 – 12 inches tall and between 2 and 4 feet in diameter.
- Once the danger of frost has past, plant four corn seeds about 1 inch deep and 6 inches apart in a square in the center of the mound. Cover with dirt and water well.
- Once the corn plants are about 5 – 6 inches tall, plant the beans and squash seeds:
 - Plant 4 bean seeds around each corn plant in a square about 1 inch deep and six inches from the base of the corn plant.
 - Plant 4 or 5 squash seeds spread out in a circle around the other seeds.
 - You'll end up having planted 4 corn seeds, 16 bean seeds and 4 -5 squash seeds
- You'll want to be sure to keep your garden watered and weeded especially when the plants are small (make sure you learn which are weeds and which are the plants!)
- Tips for picking the right seeds:
 - Corn: Traditionally the corn grown would be the kind that was dried and turned into flour or corn meal, but you can use Sweet Corn. Just be sure to pick a variety that grows at least 6 ft tall.
 - Beans: You'll want to pick beans that are 'pole or runner' beans as these are the type that produce vines.
 - Squash: Make sure you select winter squash. Winter Squash can be butternut, or acorn or delicata or other varieties. Winter Squash will produce the right kind of leaves and spread.
- See how your garden grows! Don't worry if it's not perfect. Take notes and see what worked and what didn't. Sometimes it takes several years to get a garden just right. But gardening is a great outdoor activity you can do together. Don't be afraid to try!