

- Ready Nutrition - <http://readynutrition.com> -

Survival Food Series: Three Sisters Technique

Posted By [Tess Pennington](#)

On February 9, 2010 @ 3:08 pm

Category: Micro Farming, Survival Food

[ReadyNutrition.com](#)

According to the Native American legend, the three sisters, also called "Our Sustainers" were sent down from the "Great Spirit." The sisters are inseparable and all work together in order for each sister to thrive. This trio: corn, beans and squash, have a symbiotic relationship that helps sustain the crops and gives them maximum nourishment.

The corn stalk offers itself as a structure for the beans to climb on. While the beans supply the corn with needed nitrogen as well as well as improving the overall fertility of the soil. When the beans climb the corn stalk, it also provides the stalk with added stability from strong winds. The squash vines grow at the base of the bean and corn plants and provide a type of living mulch to help conserve water and provide weed control. The roots from the squash vines are shallow and will not invade the roots of the other plants. Once the plants have been harvested they can be incorporated into the soil as organic compost, thus fertilizing the soil even more. In this approach, the efficiency of space is not only beneficial, but it is also very easy to achieve results. Moreover, this is a great gardening approach to teach [children](#) ^[1] about companion planting.

How To Create The Three Sisters Gardening Technique

Just like in human life, each sister must be by itself, before another sister comes along. In this technique, *timing and spacing are the keys to success.*

1. In late Spring or early Summer, hoe a mound of soil into piles about 1 foot high and about 20 feet across. The centers of the mound should be about four feet apart and should have flattened tops. *Note: a 10x10 square foot of space is the minimum area needed to have a good corn harvest of corn. If you have a smaller garden area, plant fewer mounds, but be aware that you may not get good full corn ears as a result. See Diagram:

<----- 10 FT. ----->



2. In the center of the mounds, plant 5-6 corn kernels in a circle about 6 inches apart.

3. After a week or two, when the corn has grown to be 5 inches or so, plant seven or eight pole beans in a circle six inches away from the corn kernels.

4. A week later, at the edge of the mound (about 1 foot away from the beans, plant seven or eight squash or pumpkin seeds.

5. When the plants begin to grow, weed out the weaker plantlings, and keep a few of the sturdiest of the corn plants from the mound as well as the bean and squash plants.

6. As the corn and beans grow, make sure that the beans are supported by the cornstalks. They should wrap themselves around the corn. The squash will creep between the mounds of the corn and bean plants.

Once the vegetables are harvested, they can be canned, dried out or eaten fresh. The yields from these vegetables will be able to further sustain a family longer. Perhaps the Native Americans were right by calling these three plants "Our Sustainers."

The three sisters: corn, beans and squash were some of the first domesticated crops used by the Native Americans to sustain their long term survival. The Native Americans taught the Pilgrims their agricultural techniques to help the Settlers survive. In fact, if it was not for these seeds given to the Pilgrims, and the three sisters approach, the Pilgrims sustainability would have been greatly diminished.

Additional Information:

[_Story of the Three Sisters](#) ^[2]

[Survival Food Series: Essential Trees, Bushes and Berries](#) ^[3]

[Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden](#) ^[4]

URL to article: http://readynutrition.com/resources/survival-food-series-three-sisters-technique_09022010/

URLs in this post:

[1] children: <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/North%20Dakota/TN%20FV/10.pdf>

[2] Story of the Three Sisters: <http://www.birdclan.org/threesisters.htm>

[3] Survival Food Series: Essential Trees, Bushes and Berries:

http://readynutrition.com/resources/survival-food-series-essential-trees-bushes-and-berries_18122009/

[4] Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden:

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/buffalo/garden/garden.html>

Copyright © 2010 Ready Nutrition. All rights reserved.