



## Indigenous Gardening Practices

Kanyen'kehá:ka (Bear Clan) educator Yakothehtón:ni Jennifer E. Brant, from Kenhtéke Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, shared with QUILLS that the 3 Sisters Ahsen nikonatate;ken:a are the foundation of Haudenosaunee agriculture. There are many different stories that explain how the Haudenosaunee came to have corn, beans, and squash. Yakothehtón:ni Jennifer E. Brant shared with QUILLS that the following video (in Kanyen'kéha) can be shown to students to illustrate how sky woman introduced corn, beans, and squash to the Haudenosaunee people:

- The Beginning- Tsítha wonders who made the world. She asks Sose, who shares our creation story: <https://tsitha.ca/tsitha-tales/videos/>.

This story comes from the Haudenosaunee *Legend of the Three Sisters*. It was said that the earth began when “Sky Woman” who lived in the upper world peered through a hole in the sky and fell through to an endless sea. The animals saw her coming, so they took the soil from the bottom of the sea and spread it onto the back of a giant turtle to provide a safe place for her to land. This “Turtle Island” is now what we call North America. Sky woman had become pregnant before she fell. When she landed, she gave birth to a daughter. When the daughter grew into a young woman, she also became pregnant (by the West wind). She died while giving birth to twin boys. Sky Woman buried her daughter in the “new earth”. From her grave grew three sacred plants- corn, beans, and squash. These plants provided food for her songs, and later, for all of humanity. These special gifts ensured the survival of the Haudenosaunee people. (Content from: <https://nsuok.edu/heritage/three-sisters-legend.aspx>)

In a 3 Sisters Garden the three sisters help each other: the corn, with a strong and tall stem, supports the bean by letting the bean plant wrap around the corn as it grows. The bean sister feeds the corn sister. The corn plant, with a symbiosis with soil nitrogen fixing bacteria, depletes the earth of nitrogen while the bean plant provides nitrogen to the corn. As the Squash Sister grows and spreads along the earth, it develops prickly leaves that discourage wandering animals from dining on the growing food. The leaves also shade the soil restricting soil drying and drought impacts. The different plant species help each other throughout the growing season.

In addition to the 3 Sisters, Robin Wall Kimmerer, who is a scientist, writer, and member of the Potawatomi Nations, says there is a fourth sister. This sister was a farmer who “noticed the ways of each species and imagined how they might live together.” Kimmerer who is also a farmer. Kimmerer writes:



# QUILLS

Queen's University Indigenous Land-Based Learning STEM  
Queen's University Biological Station

“We are the planters, the ones who clear the land, pull the weeds, and pick the bugs; we save the seeds over winter and plant them again next spring. We are midwives to their gifts. We cannot live without them, but it’s also true that they cannot live without us. Corn, beans, and squash are fully domesticated; they rely on us to create the conditions under which they can grow. We too are part of the reciprocity. They can’t meet their responsibilities unless we meet ours...The gifts of each are more fully expressed when they are nurtured together than alone. In ripe ears and swelling fruit, they counsel us that all gifts are multiplied in relationship. This is how the world keeps going.”  
(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 140).

The fourth sister are the human beings, who recognizing that they are a part of nature, tend to and care for the garden, thereby, increasing its yields.