



THREE SISTERS

Milpa and Native Americans

The concept of the Milpa, which originated among Mexican tribes and the concept of the Three Sisters, which originated among Native Americans, are great examples of sustainable food practices. When planted in combination, corn, beans, squash, and pollinator plants such as the Rocky Mountain Bee Plant, provide resilience and stave off starvation, as these plants are complementary for both the soil and body. Corn has and continues to play a sacred role in Native American tribes, especially related to their origin story and the daily, seasonal, and circle of life rituals specific to each tribe.

Composition and nutritional benefits

The most common composition of this polyculture involves corn, beans, and squash, some cultures add a fourth sister, usually a pollinator friendly flower. In the center, we find ancestral corn full of life and very tall, making two ears of corn per stalk. Climbing the strong stalk of corn we find bean's stems and leaves, trying to catch enough sunlight for photosynthesis. In reciprocity they provide nitrogen to the soil and to the corn. To close this reciprocity cycle, vines, leaves, and beautiful flowers from pumpkins and squash provide shade and retain moisture at the soil level. This shade also prevents weeds from growing around the Milpa. An optional, but rewarding fourth sister such as sunflower, amaranth, Rocky Mountain Bee Plant, or chilies, will attract pollinators. The Milpa system is an example of effective resource use as water, soil and light are evenly distributed by the nature of these three plants. This is not only an example of sustainable agriculture but also sustainable eating; mixing corn, beans and squash provides complete protein, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.



Three Sisters Succotash

Ingredients

- 1 cup Hopi turquoise corn
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 cup chopped roasted chilies
- 1/2 cup green beans or cooked Anasazi beans
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup butternut squash, chopped into 1/4" cubes
- 1 bunch cilantro, fresh, chopped
- Red pepper flakes, to taste
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions

Nixtamalize corn before boiling the corn with enough water for 40 minutes or until the corn pops open like hominy.

Using a medium sized sauté pan, sauté minced garlic and chilies in the olive oil until translucent. Add green beans, carrots and butternut squash and sauté for 20 minutes or until soft. Add corn and season to your preference. Remove succotash from heat and garnish with cilantro.

Plate over a homemade blue corn tortilla or accompanied by your favorite grain.