

American Indian Gardening and Gathering (Ojibwe & Dakota)

Curricular Areas:

Social Studies/History
Science
Language Arts

Learner Goal:

Students will recognize that Ojibwe and Dakota people made use of many wild plants, berries, nuts, roots and tubers and fruit for food. Ojibwe and Dakota women were expert gardeners, storing much food away for the winter months.

Learner Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to explain the difference between a cultivated plant and a wild plant.
2. Students will be able to discuss American Indian gardening techniques.
3. Students will be able to discuss methods used by American Indians to harvested and stored crops and gathered foods.

Teacher/Student Information :

The Ojibwe and Dakota used plants for an assortment of purposes, including food, clothing and fiber, medicine, dyes, charms, toys and religious ceremonies.

Wild plants are those that grow in wild places with no help from humans, they are gathered at different times of the year depending on the plant, what part of the plant was being gathered and for what purpose.

Cultivated plants are those that need human assistance to grow and thrive. Gardening is a living process, a part of the natural cycle. Each garden is a tiny ecosystem that will succeed if you watch and take your cues from the natural world. American Indian gardeners would know the right time to plant each crop from what was happening in nature around them.

Ojibwe women would plant their gardens in the spring after they moved to their summer homes. The principal crops were corn, pumpkins, and squash. The Ojibwe had potatoes , the seeds for which had been introduced by Traders on Lake Superior in the latter part of the 18th century. The corn was planted in hills with the pumpkins and squash planted around the hills of corn. When harvested, the corn would be roasted in the husks , parched in a hot kettle, or dried. Pumpkins and squash were either eaten fresh or dried for winter use. Squash and pumpkin blossoms were used to thicken broth. Dried vegetables were stored in a birchbark lined cache. A food cache was usually 6 feet deep. Food was placed in makuks (birchbark containers) . Dried meat and fish were placed in bags. Everything was placed in the cache, hay or

birchbark was used to fill in the holes, and beams of wood were laid across and it was covered with a mound of dirt to keep out animals.

Dakota women raised corn, squash, pumpkins and beans in much the same way as the Ojibwe. They would build platforms (wooden watch towers)to sit and watch the growing corn so that pesky birds and animals would not eat it. When the vegetables were harvested they would be dried and placed in a hole lined with dry grass(cache pit) and covered with earth to be used when needed.

Gardening techniques varied with different American Indian tribes because of location, climate, water supply and the different crops they were able to grow. Most American Indian gardeners planted in mounds or hills of earth. The same hills were planted from year to year, but each garden plot was rotated periodically and left fallow for two years so that the soil could replenish itself. The garden was planted with the corn seeds planted in mounds of dirt, beans are planted in the open spaces between the mounds of corn, as the beans grow they will climb up the corn stalks for support. The squash and pumpkins were planted on the outer edges of the garden, as they grow they would help cover the root systems of the other plants, shielding them from the hot, drying sun. This also helped keep the weeds from growing in the garden.

Tools for farming for both Ojibwe & Dakota women consisted of a digging stick, a buffalo, moose or deer shoulder blade hoe and a rake made from a deer antler. Women usually took on the task of gardening with help from their children and grandchildren.

A SAMPLING OF FOODS GATHERED BY OJIBWE AND DAKOTA PEOPLE

<u>Roots & Tubers</u>	<u>Berries</u>	<u>Fruit</u>	<u>Nuts</u>
Fiddlehead -young Fern	Strawberry	Choke Cherries	Hazelnut
Arrowroot	Blueberry	Wild Plums	Butternut
Cattail root	Raspberry	Pin Cherries	Acorn
Wild Onion	Cranberry	Currants	Walnut
Waterlily	Gooseberry	Crab apples	Pinenuts
Breadroot	Juneberry	Grapes	Beech
Prairie Turnips	Buffalo berries		

Ojibwe and Dakota people did not have salt until the fur trade.

Maple sugar, wild ginger, mountain mint were used as seasoning.

Teas were made from leaves of the wintergreen, raspberry, spruce, and snowberry, and the twigs of the wild cherry.

Activity One:

Research & Discussion Questions:

1. A great many wild plants added variety to the Ojibwe & Dakota diet. List at least five wild plants and how they were prepared.
2. How did the Ojibwe and Dakota store their excess food supply?
3. Plants provide much more than food to the Ojibwe & Dakota. Name four other ways plants could be used.
4. Research traditional American Indian gardening methods and compare them with those of the white settlers moving into Minnesota.
5. If you were going to plan, or plant a garden, what are some of the problems you might face?
6. Where do you think American Indian people got their seeds?

Activity Two:

After wild rice harvest, harvesting maple sugar, harvesting their gardens or a successful hunt Ojibwe & Dakota people had a feast, a celebration and ceremony thanking the Creator, the trees, the wild rice plants, the animals, everything connected to the process so they could have enough to eat. Have students research the many harvest celebrations and ceremonies connected to different American Indian tribes.

Activity Three

We eat more foods originated in the Americas than any other continent. Research and make a list of those foods. Keep a food journal for a week. List all the foods you consume that are credited to the Americas.

Activity Four

Pick one of the many Traditional stories that relate to plants. Suggestions: Stories in the traditional story section of this curriculum or *Native Plant Stories* by Joseph Bruchac

