



## **2023 Featured Seed: Haudenosaunee Three Sisters**

**Tuscarora White Corn - 4 seeds  
Wild Pigeon short pole beans - 2 seeds  
Cornfield pumpkin - 2 seeds**

These seeds have a long history among the Haudenosaunee people and have a connection to this land. We are thankful to Becky Webster at Ukwakhwa Inc. for sharing them with the Brown County Seed Library.

*To the Haudenosaunee people, corn, beans and squash are the Three Sisters: The physical and spiritual sustainers of life. These life-supporting plants were given to the people when all three miraculously sprouted from the body of Sky Woman's daughter, granting the gift of agriculture to the Haudenosaunee nations.*

Historically the Haudenosaunee people planted the three sisters – corn, beans and squash – in mounds together. The three sisters grow together and help each other out. The corn grows tall and strong and serves as a pole for the beans to climb. The beans put nitrogen back in the soil and help to stabilize the corn. The squash spreads on the ground like a living mulch to prevent weeds from growing and to keep moisture in the soil. They also keep animals out of the garden because the animals don't like to walk through their prickly stems and leaves. The large amount of crop residue from this planting combination can be incorporated back into the soil at the end of the season, to build up the organic matter and improve its structure. Mounds protect the seeds from getting too saturated in the spring and encourage drainage. The soil also warms up faster at the top of the mounds.

Shape the mounds about 3 ft x 2ft and ½ to 1 foot tall, with the center of each mound about 5 ft apart. The mounds should receive full sunlight. Historically, fish were placed in each mound in either fall or spring before planting. Other organic fertilizer, such as fish emulsion, can be used as well. The top of the mound may be flattened slightly to create an easier surface area for planting. As you shape the mound you can compact the soil slightly so it does not wash away in the rain.

Prepare the corn seeds for planting by soaking them in a traditional medicinal tea. Becky at Ukwakhwa uses a tea made from the mayapple plant. Other medicines include milkweed, white pine, Marsh Reed, battle brush and hellebore root. Prepare the tea by heating a few cups of water to boiling, turning off the burner, and placing the plant material in the water. Allow to steep for several hours. Then discard the plant material from your tea into your compost pile or direct in your garden. Pour the tea into a mason jar and add your corn kernels. Some of the tea will be

absorbed by the corn so leave some room at the top of your jar. After about 15 min, remove any corn that is still floating on top of the liquid, as this likely won't germinate. Allow to sit 8 hrs or overnight someplace warm (like the top of your fridge). Plant the corn kernels in the mounds about 10 inches apart, 1-2 inches deep, making a square.

After a few weeks or when the corn is about 6 inches tall, it is time to plant the beans and squash. Soak the bean seeds overnight in water. On the day of planting, rough up the soil on top of the mound a bit. Put one pole bean seed by each corn about an inch away on the outside of the corn. Plant each bean seed 1.5" deep. For the squash, plant the seeds 2 ft apart on the south-facing side of the mound, about ½-1" deep.

### **Harvest and use:**

**Tuscarora White Corn** (also known as Iroquois White Corn) is harvested, dried and used for three different preparations. The first is Hulled Whole Hominy, a whole corn kernel also known as posole with wonderful corn flavor and consistency. The second is Tamal flour, which is made from hulled corn that is then stone-milled. Finally comes the Roasted Corn Flour, where the corn is lightly dry pan-roasted and then stone ground. The roasted corn meal has a sweet, nutty, true corn flavor.

**Wild Pigeon Beans** are harvested for dried beans. Good for soups, stews or stuffings. Its nutty flavor is reminiscent of hickory nuts; it can be ground for flour and added to grits or mush to impart an interesting background flavor. It also goes well with morels and other wild mushrooms.

**Cornfield Pumpkins** can be harvested and used like any other pumpkin.

YouTube videos by Becky at Ukwakhwa demonstrating the preparation and planting technique.

[Making mounds for three sisters gardens](https://youtu.be/hWURhP9sZpw)

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[Soaking Corn in Tea for Planting](https://youtu.be/1Diy1qMnjo8)

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[Three Sisters Gardening Planting Beans and Squash](https://youtu.be/rWzFXZK05ZM)

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