

This activity is adapted from Washington State Historical Society's *History at Home*, a series of online lessons designed to serve families engaged in remote learning during the pandemic.

History at Home

Stewarding the Land and Cultivation: Plant a garden!

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE SUCCESSFULLY stewarded the land of the Pacific Northwest since time immemorial. Hunting and gathering have always provided food for traditional diets including salmon, shellfish, and berries, and traditional agricultural practices have yielded bitterroot, nettles, and other plants.

Long before white settlers began to arrive, Indigenous peoples used their knowledge of the land to enhance natural systems. When plants were harvested, the soil was turned to continue the cycle of growth. Low-intensity controlled burns added nutrients into the soil, reduced insect populations and helped to prevent large-scale wildfires.

As white settlers moved into Washington, some tribes adopted other farming techniques and began to plant crops such as wheat, corn and potatoes, and some began planting in rows.

Companion gardening—in which the individual plants help each other to grow—was another agriculture technique that made its way westward. A common example is a Three Sisters garden comprised of corn, beans, and squash. Corn is planted first and when the stalks are sturdy, beans are planted, with the runners using the corn stalks to climb. Then squash is planted along the garden's edge to provide ground cover for the corn and beans.

You can grow your own Three Sisters garden! But first, let's check to see if your soil is fertile for planting, using "the peanut butter jar method" to measure the sand, silt and clay content. Soil that will support the Three Sisters contains roughly 20% clay, 40% silt and 40% sand.

TOOLS NEEDED:

- Jar with a lid (doesn't have to be a peanut butter jar)
- Ruler
- Timer or stopwatch (you can use a smartphone or a watch with a second hand)
- Paper and pencil

Step 1: Dig a 6-inch deep hole in the area where you plan to garden, and fill your jar $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ full of dirt.

Step 2: Add water to the jar, leaving about an inch of room at the top.

Step 3: Let the jar sit while the soil soaks up the water.

Step 4: Put the lid on tight, and shake the jar vigorously for up to 3 minutes.

Step 5: Set the jar down and carefully time 1 minute. Place your ruler alongside the jar, and measure the thickness of the layer of sediment at the bottom. Write that measurement down: ____ (Example: 1 inch). This is the sand layer.

Step 6: Set your timer for 4 minutes. Measure the sediment again. Write that measurement down: ____ (Example: 2 inches). Subtract the sand measurement number you noted in Step 5. (Example: $2 - 1 = 1$). Write down the answer: ____ . This is the silt layer.

Step 7: Let the jar sit for 24 hours. Measure one last time! Write that number down: ____ (Example: $2 \frac{1}{2}$). Subtract the first measurement you noted in Step 6. (Example: $2 \frac{1}{2} - 2 = \frac{1}{2}$.) Write that number down: ____ . This is the clay layer.

If your soil contains at least 40% sand (you can estimate this—is your sand number a bit less than half of your total?), you have well-draining soil that is good for planting. If you have more silt or clay soil, adding coarse sand, compost or peat moss can make it better for planting.

If you live in a space without a yard, try container gardening! Use a large coffee can or a milk jug with the top cut off to plant herbs. Try a large bucket or crate for growing tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, potatoes, bush beans, lettuce, carrots, and radishes. Puncture a few holes in the bottom or side for good drainage. Then, arrange gravel or small stones in the bottom before filling with soil and compost. Try to keep the containers a few inches off the ground with bricks, and place them in a spot that gets at least five hours of sunshine a day. Sit back and watch as your garden grows!

ABOVE: Gathering basket, southern NorthWest Coast culture area, Puget Sound Salish, circa 1890s-1920s. WSHS Catalog ID: 2019.0.147.