

THREE SISTERS

The Three Sisters Belt is a modern interpretation featuring three colored diamonds, one for each of Three Sisters: Corn, Beans, and Squash. Historically the diamonds or "planting hills" were white on a field of purple wampum.

The Three Sisters, known as Deohako ("the Life Sustainers"), formed the basis of traditional Haudenosaunee agriculture and diet. There are several origin stories of the Three Sisters, one of which tells of three sisters named Corn, Beans, and Squash. The youngest dressed in green and could only crawl, the second wore a yellow dress and loved to run, and the oldest had long yellow hair and stood tall, protecting her sisters. As time passed, the sisters became separated from each other, but were reunited during the harvest season. Another account traces the origin of the Three Sisters to the Haudenosaunee creation story. Skywoman fell from the Skyworld and landed on the back of a giant turtle, where she spread soil to create land. Skywoman gave birth to a daughter, who grew up and died while giving birth. From the daughter's grave grew the Three Sisters. Both origin stories emphasize the physical and spiritual sustenance of the Three Sisters as well as the sustaining role of Haudenosaunee women in supporting Haudenosaunee society.

Traditionally, the Haudenosaunee would plant the Three Sisters seeds in small hills. Corn would sprout first and dirt would be mounded around the seedlings. After a few weeks, beans would sprout, and their tendrils would use the corn stalks for support. In return, bean plants would provide nutrients for other plants by bringing nitrogen from the air into the soil. The large leaves of squash plants would shade the soil of all three to maintain its moisture and prevent weed growth. The agricultural balance of the Three Sisters preserves the health of the soil as well as the health of the Haudenosaunee. Today, Haudenosaunee activists and teachers are trying to keep the Three Sisters tradition alive through efforts such as educational gardens, the Cayuga S.H.A.R.E. Farm, and the Iroquois White Corn Project.