

## Geddy Garden News

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January is the earth's resting period but the gardeners planning time. So far my plans include early peas in my kitchen garden as well as a repeat of colorful Morning- glories on my fence. I hope to have an abundance of those. In this quiet time I often reflect on the 18<sup>th</sup>-century gardeners and their activities. I usually concentrate on the colonists but I think it is important to also consider the ways of the Indians.

The Indians were indeed America's first farmers. They used the land and then moved on and abandoned it thus allowing it to rest. They followed plant cycles and seasonal changes and they sought out wetlands where animals came to feed to make their homes.

They spoke of "eating" the land and "using" the land, not owning the land. As long as you used and ate from the land you were the owner. Some early Indians did not preserve food because they believed the world was one of abundance and their would always be food available.

In this Tidewater area we are interested in the Powhatan Indians. They were a confederation of tribes. They cleared the woodlands and made parklands and separated their corn fields with fields of squash. Their tools were planting sticks to weed with, wooden hoes and stone axes. Their land was nourished with dead fish, sea- weed, and rotted vegetables. They were skilled agriculturists.

Their main crops were corn, squash and beans. All corn originally came from Indian corn. These three crops are called the three sisters. When corn season ended pumpkins and squash became the Indians' chief food. Corn was planted in hills and they had four varieties of corn. It was prepared in several ways, roasted or boiled while green, in the form of mush, hominy, corn soup, corn dumplings and even popcorn. It is no wonder that the Iroquois name for corn or maize means "our life."

Women did the gardening in the Indian communities and took pride in their work. Indians loved their gardens and grew more than half their food. The other half was obtained by the men who were hunting, fishing and gathering. Enough food was grown to allow the Indians to trade food and they were also generous in giving food to the poor and to visitors.

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They used the gardens, in some tribes, as a community gathering place. They socialized in the gardens and the woman talked to each other and also sang as they worked. These songs were sometimes called corn songs. Men visited their sweet-hearts in gardens. They would often plan a romantic rendezvous there.

A number of Indian groups accepted Christianity. In 1625 Jesuit missionaries began efforts to convert tribes to Christianity and continued their efforts for more than a century, though they had limited success. The difficulty was due to the basic differences in fundamental religious beliefs.

Indian religious philosophy reflected a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature and was expressed artistically in religious rituals which combined poetry, music and dance. They believed the natural and the supernatural were intertwined. Their gardens were central to their religion, since the crops they grew held spiritual significance. Corn especially was held in the highest regard. Some tribes held the belief that corn came with the first people. Others believed that the first people were descended from corn. Either belief caused them to have strong ties with their gardens and with the corn crop in particular. We see in Indian drawings three realms. The sky represented the superpower, the earth represented the people or middle world and the third realm is water which they called the deeps. Indians believed that spiritual encounters were experienced by everyone through nature.

The landscape served the Indian as a set of moral lessons. Its physical features were linked to stories and family relationships and loyalty. Things such as stones, mountains and brush heaps marked events in folktales. Even a fork in the road could tell a story. Their stories were told, not in storybooks but in the real land. There was the creator god and the threatening evil god and much of the Indian worship was an effort to protect themselves from the actions of the powerful evil god.

The Indians left many enduring legacies throughout our land. Many words and names which we are familiar with have Indian origins. So many places such as towns, counties, rivers, plants, trees and even foods such as succotash were given their names by the Indians. In my next newsletter I will include some examples of the practical lifestyles of Indians as this subject warrants the attention of more than one newsletter.

*Janet Guthrie*

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