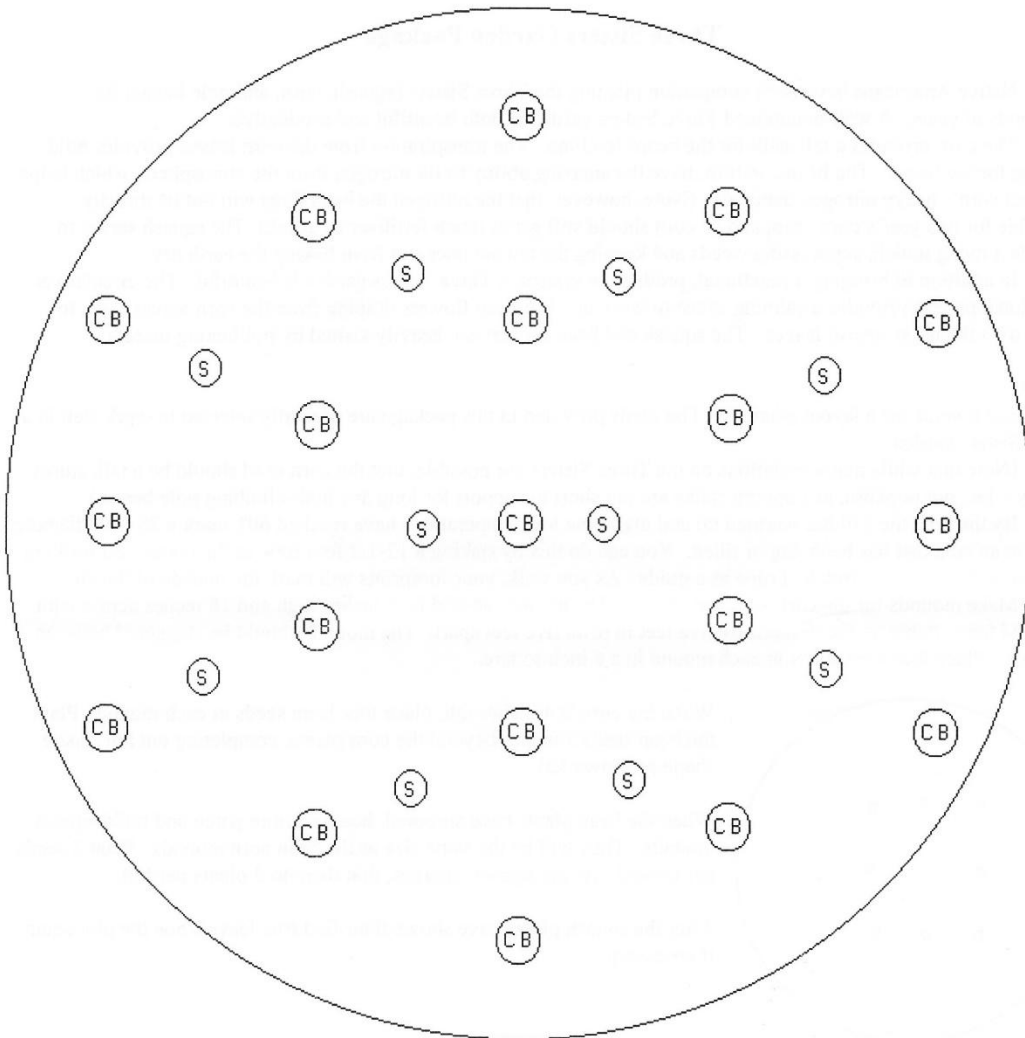


Three Sisters Companion Planting

In spring 2010 I experimented with the Three Sisters Companion Planting, a Native American companion planting of squash, corn and pole beans, for my first time. There were some points where I didn't follow the directions at all, so I thought I would write a How To article to share the directions I received, how I did or didn't follow them, and the outcomes. As you can see in the photo to the right (all photos taken by Don Ray), the corn patch was pretty healthy!



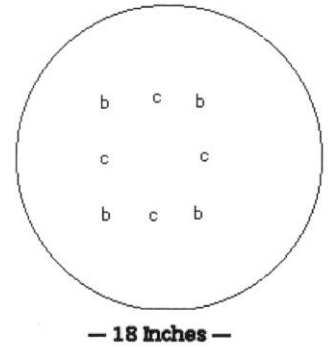
The Three Sisters Garden Package included a 57 gram packet of Tennessee Red Cob corn, one oz. of Kentucky Wonder Garden Beans, and three oz. of Seminole Pumpkin seeds. The plot is supposed to be a circle 25 feet in diameter, a diagram is below. The packet of corn was far more than I needed, and I ended up planting out a rectangular area that was roughly 25 feet by 60 feet, using the pattern recommended, with seed left over.



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The corn is supposed to be a tall and sturdy variety, to support the pole beans and planted when the soil was warmed up and the night time lows are only about 60 degrees Fahrenheit. In southern Iowa this year, that was shortly after Mayday.

The corn should be planted out in mounds that should be five inches high and 18 inches across. I just noticed I was supposed to flatten the tops, which I didn't do. I made the mounds with compost of mostly broken down straw and sheep manure. This turned out to keep the mounds together really well through fairly heavy rains this spring when the soil which is heavily clay was all flattened out around the mounds. The mounds should be separated five feet from the center of each next mound, and in staggered rows. Four corn seeds should go into the mound forming a six inch square.



I buried each seed of corn with a handful of compost from another pile which was mostly broken down food waste, straw, grass, goat and chicken manure. The seed germination rate was nearly 100%, though a few plants turned yellow and died.

Don tilled in between the mounds then I cultivated in between the mounds with a hoe, and worked some of the soil onto the mounds, to try to help them keep their form.

When the bulk of the corn was roughly four inches tall, I planted four bean seeds per mound three inches from the corn plants, making squares like in the diagram in the upper right hand corner of this page. The one oz. package of beans was half of what I needed, and Don bought me another packet so I could finish planting out the area.

I was supposed to wait until the beans sprouted before I planted the pumpkins, but the day the beans were supposed to start germinating we were expecting heavy rains, so I went out, cultivated with a hoe again, and made mounds for the pumpkins the same way I did for the corn and beans, in between the central mounds of corn and beans. Again, the amount of pumpkin seeds didn't match the ratio for corn. But with my previous experience with other cucurbits in Iowa, I wasn't worried about their ability to take over the area.

The directions, as shown above, advocated filling nearly all the areas between the corn and bean mounds be filled with squash mounds, planting three seeds per mound, then thinning to two per mound after germination.

Due to lack of seeds and my previous experience with squash, cucumbers and pumpkins here, I ended up mostly making two rows of mounds that went through the corn patch long ways through the corn patch between the corn and bean mounds, with two pumpkin seeds and handfuls of compost per mound. I made a couple other mounds to use my last four seeds on the edges, so I could still train the vines to grow along the corn patch if I had to.

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I was supposed to only hoe the plot one more time if I had to, but I was nervous and kept the plot cultivated very well until the pumpkins started to fill out.

Possibly because it was too wet and/or cool, the bean and pumpkin seeds didn't germinate too well, at about 50%. But what did germinate was vigorous!

Very quickly the beans started to grow up the corn, and the pumpkins filled up the ground. The corn grew to be some ten feet tall and I saw why I probably didn't need to cultivate as much as I did after all.



If any readers of this are interested in helping start a journal of anti-capitalist farmers, and /or a study group, please let me know, and/or consider joining the Workers' International Industrial Union (WIIU), which I am a member of. My e-mail address is cardweaver@hushmail.com. Thanks for taking the time to read this!

**They Only Call It
'Class Warfare'
When We Fight
Back!**

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