

The newer hybrid seeds were first developed and sold in the 1930s. Hybrids combine desirable qualities of their parent plants such as high yield under many conditions and disease resistance. However, hybrid seeds must be produced under controlled conditions and cannot be reliably saved. Seeds saved from hybrid plants tend to revert back to one of the parent plants, or to be sterile. Hybrid seeds must be obtained each year from various seed companies. Because of their desirable qualities, farmers started using hybrid seeds and stopped saving Heirloom seeds. As a result, many older vegetable varieties were lost forever.

The loss of older open-pollinated vegetable varieties has resulted in less genetic diversity in the world's food crops. Genetic diversity is needed to help maintain a stable world food supply and to provide breeding stock to produce hybrids. The danger of disease wiping out a whole vegetable crop is high if there are only a few open pollinated varieties of that vegetable remaining.

By researching, locating, growing, and saving Heirloom seeds, the historic garden at Grand Portage National Monument is helping to preserve genetic diversity in the food plant world.



WHAT YOU CAN DO



For more information, attend the historic garden program held at the Monument.



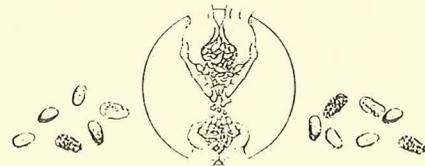
A garden map and seed source list are available on request from costumed interpreters in the Kitchen or Great Hall.



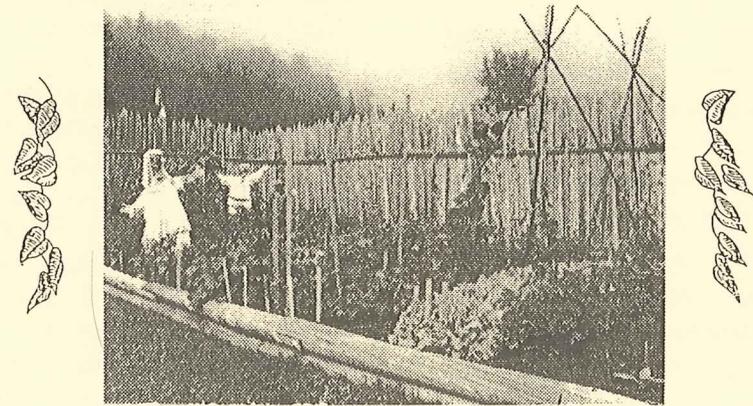
Support or join a non-profit seed saving organization.



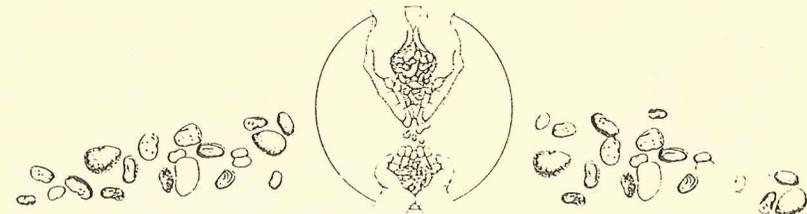
Consider growing one or two Heirloom plant varieties, saving the seeds, and handing them down to the next generation.

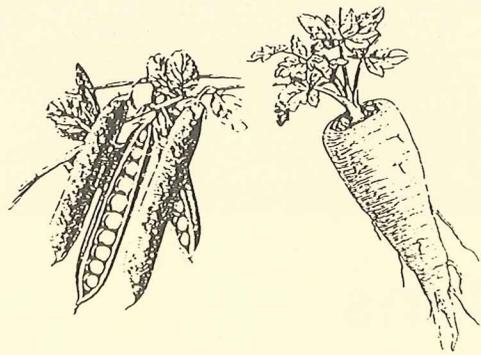


The Historic Gardens



The Grand Portage historic gardens are located outside the palisade walls by the Ojibwe Village and inside the palisade behind the kitchen. The North West Company operated its post here from 1778 to 1803. Many vegetable varieties grown in the garden date back to the 1700s and early 1800s. Vegetable varieties from 200 years ago and earlier are still available today because Native American and early settler families saved seeds from their harvests to plant in the following year. The seeds saved were handed down from one generation to another.





THE SEED TRADE

American Indian tribes had well established trade routes long before the first European explorers arrived in North America. Along with other items, seeds were traded among Indian tribes. The explorers and settlers brought their seeds with them to North America. When the Indians and early settlers started trading, seeds were among the objects exchanged. Peas and parsnips were adopted by the Indians and the settlers began growing beans, squash, and corn in their gardens.



THE ORIGINAL GRAND PORTAGE GARDEN

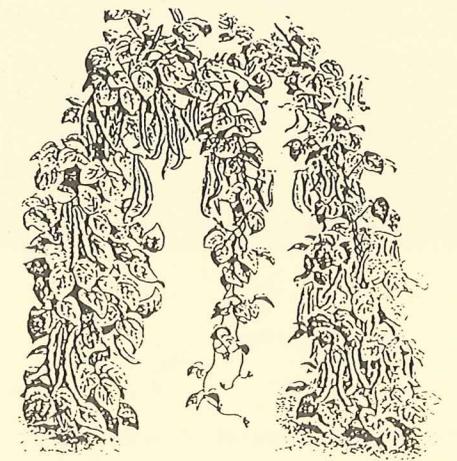
According to diaries of fur traders who were at Grand Portage, the main crop grown in the garden was potatoes. Diaries of fur traders at interior North West Company posts beyond Grand Portage and a 1797 inventory taken at Grand Portage suggest that other vegetables were grown here as well. The garden provided fresh vegetables for North West Company gentlemen who were here for Rendezvous. The garden also produced vegetables for winter storage and use by the few Company employees who were stationed at Grand Portage for the winter. Ojibwe women and sometimes voyageurs planted and tended the gardens.



TODAY'S HISTORIC GARDEN

The present garden consists of two raised beds. The raised beds are not historic. The ground under the beds has not been completely excavated by archaeologists. Raised beds are a way to re-create the original gardens and not disturb any artifacts that are still in the ground underneath the beds.

The Three Sisters garden bed located outside the palisade by the Ojibwe Village shows a traditional Native American style of planting. The Three Sisters – corn, beans, and squash – are grown together in a field. The Three Sisters balance and nourish each other. Corn is planted in hills and feeds heavily on the soil. Beans send their runners up the corn stalks and add nitrogen to the soil. Squash is planted at the ends of corn fields and also between corn plots in a field. Squash sends its long, prickly runners through the small rows discouraging both small animals and weeds as well as helping to hold moisture in the ground. Gardening was a traditional summer activity of the Ojibwe women.



The garden bed located inside the palisade behind the kitchen represents a typical fur trade kitchen garden. The kitchen garden is planted with a mix of Native American, European, and Asian vegetables and herbs. A more European-gardening style is used, with vegetables planted in rows instead of hills and beans running up poles rather than cornstalks.



THE IMPORTANCE OF TODAY'S HISTORIC GARDEN

The historic seeds used in today's garden are called Heirlooms. Heirlooms are open-pollinated seeds that were grown before the 1940s. Plants grown from open-pollinated seeds will reliably reproduce seeds with the genetic blueprint for that same plant year after year. As a result, open-pollinated seeds are ideal for saving and using in next year's garden.

