American Indian Gardening and Gathering (Ojibwe & Dakota)  
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**Grades:** 6th - 8th Grade  
**Lesson:** 1  
**Unit:** 1: American Indian traditional land values  
**Subject:** History/Social Studies  
**Achievement Goal:** Students will recognize that Ojibwe and Dakota people made use of many wild plants, berries, nuts, roots and tubers and fruit for food. Ojibwe and Dakota women were expert gardeners, storing much food away for the winter months.  
**Time:** Multiple class periods

**Lesson Description:**  
Students learn about the types of plants grown and gathered by the Ojibwe and Dakota tribes, as well as the various uses beyond just food for these plants.

**Teacher Background:**  
The Ojibwe and Dakota used plants for an assortment of purposes, including food, clothing and fiber, medicine, dyes, charms, toys and religious ceremonies.

Wild plants are those that grow in wild places with no help from humans, they are gathered at different times of the year depending on the plant, what part of the plant was being gathered and for what purpose.

Cultivated plants are those that need human assistance to grow and thrive. Gardening is a living process, a part of the natural cycle. Each garden is a tiny ecosystem that will succeed if you watch and take your cues from the natural world. American Indian gardeners would know the right time to plant each crop from what was happening in nature around them.

Ojibwe women would plant their gardens in the spring after they moved to their summer homes. The principal crops were corn, pumpkins, and squash. The Ojibwe had potatoes, the seeds for which had been introduced by traders on Lake Superior in the latter part of the 18th century. The corn was planted in hills with the pumpkins and squash planted around the hills of corn. When harvested, the corn would be roasted in the husks, parched in a hot kettle, or dried. Pumpkins and squash were either eaten fresh or dried for winter use. Squash and pumpkin blossoms were used to thicken broth. Dried vegetables were stored in a birch bark lined cache. A food cache was usually 6 feet deep. Food was placed in makuks (birch bark containers). Dried meat and fish were placed in bags. Everything was placed in the cache, hay or birch bark was used to fill in the holes, and beams of wood were laid across and it was covered with a mound of dirt to keep out animals.

Dakota women raised corn, squash, pumpkins and beans in much the same way as the Ojibwe. They would build platforms (wooden watch towers) to sit and watch the growing corn so that pesky birds and animals would not eat it. When the vegetables were harvested they would be dried and placed in a hole lined with dry grass (cache pit) and covered with earth to be used when needed.

Gardening techniques varied with different American Indian tribes because of location, climate, water supply and the different crops they were able to grow. Most American Indian gardeners planted in mounds or hills of earth. The same hills were planted from year to year, but each garden plot was rotated periodically and left fallow for two years so that the soil could replenish itself. The garden was planted with the corn seeds planted in mounds of dirt, beans were planted in the open spaces between the mounds of corn, as the beans grew they would climb up the corn stalks for support. The squash and pumpkins were planted on the outer edges of the garden, as they grew they would help cover the root systems of the other plants, shielding them from the hot, drying sun. This also helped keep the weeds from growing in the garden.

Tools for farming for both Ojibwe & Dakota women consisted of a digging stick, a buffalo, moose or deer shoulder blade hoe and a rake made from a deer antler. Women usually took on the task of gardening with help from their children and grandchildren.

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Ojibwe and Dakota people did not have salt until the fur trade.

Maple sugar, wild ginger, mountain mint were used as seasoning.

Teas were made from leaves of the wintergreen, raspberry, spruce, and snowberry, and the twigs of the wild cherry.

**Standards:**
This lesson aligns with Common Core standards RH1, RH2, RH4.

**6th Grade**

**RH1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

**RH2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

**RH4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

**Teacher Preparation Resources:**
- Familiarize yourself with the information in the Teacher Background section as well as the Lesson Resources section.
- Print copies of the Ojibwe Plant Stories and the Ojibwe and Dakota Food Gathering Chart listed in the Lesson Resources section.
- Arrange internet access for student research.

**Student Activity:**
Drawing on information in the Teacher Background and Lesson Resources sections, provide students with an introduction to Dakota and Ojibwe gardening and gathering, and then guide them through the following activities.

**Section One**

1. Research and discuss with students how a great many wild plants added variety to the Ojibwe and Dakota diet.
2. List at least five wild plants and how they were prepared. (See Ojibwe and Dakota Food Gathering Chart in the Lesson Resources section.)
3. Explore how the Ojibwe and Dakota stored their excess food supply.
4. Explain how plants provide much more than food to the Ojibwe and Dakota. Name four other ways plants are used.
5. Research traditional American Indian gardening methods and compare them with those of the white settlers moving into Minnesota.
6. If you were going to plan, or plant a garden, what are some of the problems you might face?
7. Where do you think American Indian people got their seeds?

**Section Two**

1. Explain that after wild rice harvest, harvesting maple sugar, harvesting their gardens or a successful hunt the Ojibwe and Dakota people had a feast. They held a celebration and ceremony thanking the Creator, the trees, the wild rice plants, the animals, and everything
connected to the process so they could have enough to eat.
2. Have students research the many harvest celebrations and ceremonies connected to different American Indian tribes.

Section Three

1. Talk about how we eat more foods originated in the Americas than any other continent.
2. Research and make a list of those foods.
3. Keep a food journal for a week.
4. List all the foods you consume that are credited to the Americas.

Section Four

1. Pick one of the many traditional stories that relate to plants. Suggestions: Stories in the traditional story section of this curriculum: Ojibwe Plant Stories (see the Lesson Resources section) or Native Plant Stories by Joseph Bruchac.
2. Have students read the story or parts of the story.
3. Discuss what they learned or what they were familiar with from the reading.

Evaluation:
At the completion of the above activities, evaluate whether students are able to:

1. Explain the difference between a cultivated plant and a wild plant.
2. Describe American Indian gardening techniques.
3. Describe methods used by American Indians to harvested and stored crops and gathered foods.

Lesson Resources:

- Ojibwe Plant Stories
- Ojibwe and Dakota Food Gathering Chart

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Links: