



Heritage Garden



Trade

The Heritage Garden is based upon archeological, ethnobotanical, and historical research on subsistence in the North American Southwest, Four Corners Region, and Aztec Ruins National Monument. The varieties grown in the garden are examples of the types of crops that would have been grown here when the site was occupied.

The varieties in this garden have adapted to different climate and geographic conditions and elevations in and near the southwest; this has encouraged adaptations for tolerance of many pests and diseases, as well as drought and heat tolerance. In addition to agricultural crops, wild plants in the area continued to play an important role in daily life, and are considered an important aspect of a prehistoric diet.



Ancient Agriculture

Ancient farming in the Four Corners area consisted of crops like corn, beans and squash that were first domesticated and cultivated about 7,000-13,000 years ago near Central America and what is now Mexico.

Through migrations and emigrations of people, seeds, and agricultural knowledge, what is now known as maize agriculture began to expand about 4,500 years ago throughout the North American Southwest.

Some of the earliest archeological dates for maize have been identified in New Mexico in rock shelters and caves, near the Four Corners area.



Water

Water availability has long been a challenge in the southwest, and many different techniques resulted from the variety of situations that people were confronted with in order to get water. Dry farming, which is a method of farming that depends primarily on rain, would have occurred within canyons and arroyos, along alluvial fans, and on the tops of mesas. Water catchment ditches, check dams, terraces near

springs, and water carried in containers from a nearby water source were all possible methods.

Flood irrigation near permanent sources of water, like rivers or lakes, would have been employed by directing the water towards the garden plot using small canals, then diverting the water through the use of small ditches. Methods that employed efficient water use, like small basins around the plants, was not uncommon.

Beyond corn, beans, and squash

Ancestral Pueblo farmers employed a mixed economy of agriculture, hunting, and gathering throughout the year.



A substantial amount of the yearly diet was based on wild plant products for food, as well as for dyes, basketry, tools, and other items like cradles and arrow shafts, and construction materials.

In addition to gathering many wild plant products, several plants that appeared in gardens or disturbed soils were likely gathered, and even encouraged along with the primary crops. These plants could be used for nutritious spring greens, and seeds for flour, cooking and storage in the fall for the winter months.

Useful Weeds?

Amaranth, purslane, tansymustard, goosefoot, ground cherries (tomatillos), Rocky Mountain beeweed, sunflowers, and several other plants or weedy annuals were likely common supplemental foods.

Allowing some of these plants to grow among cultivated crops would have created a protective ground cover to keep soil moist and protected from wind, encourage pollinators, distract pests, and eventually provide vital nutrients to the soil as they were folded in to the earth by farmers tending their fields.

The combination of agricultural crops, weedy annuals in the gardens, and wild

plants near the pueblo would have met a vast array of nutritional needs and offered a variety of foods to the inhabitants of Aztec.



Culture and Corn

The large variety of color, texture and size of corn, beans and squash is due to the cultural context in which they were domesticated and grown. The cultures that selected for diversity and individuality did so in varying conditions and environments, creating one of the greatest testaments to the wealth of knowledge in the Americas,

long before the introduction of Old World crops and philosophy. The cultures (prehistoric and modern), that have kept this diversity alive, are to thank for these treasures. It is a privilege to be able to participate in preserving so many great varieties by growing and learning about them in the present.

