

# The Story of Three Sisters: A stew of beans, corn and squash.

by Traci Barr



Of all the recipes, why does this humble one matter so much to me? Because it metaphorically represents the most important aspect of what I've learned during my JustFaith experience.

First recognized by the inherent wisdom of Indigenous People, the Three Sisters is an example of perfect agricultural — and nutritional! — synergy. In other words: of “companion planting.”

To get the highest yield, beans were planted right next to corn, whose tall stalks created a natural sort of “trellis” for the beans’ climbing vines. In return, the bean plants captured nitrogen from the air and enriched the soil through their roots, replacing what the corn plants took from the earth.

Squash plants — with their large and low-to-the-ground leaves — made for edible ground cover, which not only kept away weeds and insects, but also provided shade for the roots of the corn and bean plants and kept the ground moist.

Which helped the corn grow taller. Which helped the bean plants get bigger. Which eventually meant: more people got fed at the dinner table.

The other lesson?

We are all connected. We can do so much more when we work together. Our lives are enriched when we intentionally engage with — or purposefully plant ourselves next to — people who experience the world in an entirely different way.

There is no “us” or “them” ... unless we choose to label, and think of, ourselves, as so. In this context, the whole truly is greater than the sum of its parts.

## The Three Sisters Stew



- 2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 2 large carrots, diced
- 2 large celery stalks, diced
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 large garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
- 1 large butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 4 cups cooked pinto beans (canned, drained, rinsed beans are fine)
- 1 quart vegetable stock (you might not need it all)
- 2 cups corn kernels (fresh cut from the cob is best, but frozen is fine, too)
- ½ cup rough chopped parsley, if desired, to garnish

Heat extra virgin olive oil in a large Dutch-oven style pot. Add diced onions, carrots, celery, and bay leaves. Sauté over medium-high heat until vegetables have started to get tender and turn golden, about 10 minutes.

Add bay leaves, minced garlic, kosher salt, black pepper and minced rosemary. Sauté until garlic is very fragrant, about 3 minutes.

Add butternut squash chunks, pinto beans, and half the vegetable stock to the pot. Stir everything together. Add more stock at this point if you think it's necessary — but remember that the squash will release a bit of liquid as it cooks. Reduce heat and simmer until the squash is tender, about 12 to 15 minutes (longer if chunks are bigger). Add stock, if necessary, to maintain stew-like consistency.

Add corn to pot and cook for 2 minutes. Turn off heat and garnish with chopped parsley, if using.

Season with additional kosher salt and black pepper, if desired. Remove bay leaf from pot before serving.