The Three Sisters

I always thought the three sisters were the three big hills we had to pull our trailer through between Evanston and Fort Bridger to get to Flaming Gorge. Another use of the term The Three Sisters was used by the Iroquois Indians when they planted Corn, Beans, and Squash together.

Corn, beans and squash are considered by the Iroquois to be special gifts from the Great Spirit. The well-being of each crop is believed to be protected by one of the Three Sisters, spirits that are collectively called De-o-ha-ko. This word means "our sustainers" or "those who support us".

The three sisters system refers to the planting of corn, pole beans, and squash together in hills. In the Three Sister planting system, raised areas are made about three feet apart. Several seeds of corn are planted in each hill. As the emerging plants grow, the soil is gently mounded around the base of the corn plants. When the corn is about four to six inches high, bean seeds and squash seeds are planted in the hills. Pole bean seeds are planted in each hill, and squash seeds are planted in about every seventh hill. The three crops grow together for the remainder of the season.

This interplanting has many advantages. The hills provide support around the base of the corn plants, so they are not as prone to wind damage. The corn forms a support for the pole beans, and the squash covers the soil, helping to control weeds. Beans are in the legume family; they take nitrogen from the air and convert it into a form that plants can use. This is important because corn demands a fairly high amount of nitrogen. The nitrogen "left" in the hill by the beans is available for the other plants to use. We also have a list of other plants that grow well together. Download a copy of Companion Planting.