

COMMUNITY



Alewives pointing in the four directions of the compass

An Indian Garden

by Annette Hinkle

Lamont Smith paused to sniff the air as a nasty breeze whipped off Napeague Bay. It was mid-April, well into Spring but Mother Nature's calendar still read February. More than a foot of snow had dropped only ten days earlier. "I smell a fox," he said after detecting the musky scent of the elusive animal, "That's a good sign." Smith's family is known as the Red Fox Clan. "My father was Chief Red Fox and as kids we always had foxes as pets."

Lamont Smith is a Shinnecock Indian who has spent years cultivating a native American garden on his property on Shinnecock Reservation and was taught native farming techniques by his father. I joined him on this blustery day to help with the initial stages of the Native American Garden Project in Accabonac, outside East Hampton.

Along with Elizabeth Bowser, a Sag Harbor resident who organized the project, we spent the morning fishing for alewives as they migrated from the ocean to spawn in Big Fresh Pond. That April day the fish were planted ceremonial style in fifteen beds, four to a bed with tails touching and heads facing in the four different directions. The alewives act as fertilizer and were left buried until nature signaled the start of planting season. "When the shad bush has leaves as big as mouse ears and the oak leaves are the size of squirrel ears, it's time to plant," said Smith.

The Native American Garden Project, a program of



Lamont Smith



Elizabeth Bowser

the New Tudor Foundation, is being carried out on three acres in Accabonac and another half acre in East Hampton. The use of the Accabonac acreage, found for the Garden by John vH. Halsey, director of the Peconic Land Trust, was donated by the owner, Mary Ryan, who wanted the property cultivated. The garden is an educational project and organizers hope it will encourage home gardeners to try organic planting methods developed by Indians in the Americas over thousands of years. Heritage seeds handed down for generations are planted throughout the garden. Smith has planted two types of gardens on the Accabonac plot. The fifteen beds we began in April have been maintained in strictly traditional Indian fashion with total reliance on Mother Nature for moisture.

On the full moon in May, Smith planted corn in the beds where the fish had been buried. During the first full moon of June, hills were built up around the corn to keep the young plants from blowing over and beans and squash were planted among the corn. Corn, beans and squash are known as the three sister crops of native cultures and they grow together in a remarkable way. While the corn grows straight up, the beans climb around the corn and provide the soil with nitrogen. The squash leaves shade the ground, keep moisture in and make it difficult for weeds to take hold. "From pre-

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contact times these three have been grown together," says Smith. "It's a question whether the native Indians knew of the nitrogen fixing properties of beans. Also, it has been found that there is a beneficial mushroom that grows only when these three plants are grown in conjunction. Scientists have just found this out. This is an educational garden and new discoveries like this add to the educational value."

The second garden on the site was started later in Spring and was designed by Smith using a medicine wheel and beadwork medallion motif with colors planted according to those designated by the Ancients for each of the four directions. "The word 'Accabonac' means 'place where the wild potato grows'. In Native culture the wild potato is the wild sunflower, which is the Jerusalem artichoke," say Smith. "They look like small sunflowers and grew wild in Accabonac, they're tubers eaten like potatoes." For this reason, Smith selected many types of sunflowers and potatoes to grow in the medicine wheel garden and organic methods used by modern Indians are incorporated into its maintenance, such as hose watering.

"The center of the garden is a circle of wild potatoes. Then we branch out to corn grown from seeds believed to be derived from the first corn which was grown in Mexico over 20,000 years ago," says Smith. "It's called Teo Sinte, the mother of all corn." From there the garden extends out in all directions, planted with crops like tomatillos, popcorn and sweet potatoes specific to the sacred colors associated with each direction. "White is for North, white corn, white beans, silvery sunflowers are all planted in the North," points out Smith. "For South the color is blue or black, East is yellow, because the sun rises there. All the yellow corn and potatoes are in the East part of the garden and West is red." There are paths lined with sunflowers throughout the garden that allow easy access for weeding and planting.

By August, things are looking up. The field is green and lush. Birds sing loudly as they swoop low over the garden and butterflies flit from flower to flower. In the "three sisters" garden,

the beds where the fish were planted are now tall with corn and squash winds along the ground. Rabbits have made short work of some of the beans, but the change is dramatic nonetheless. Wildflowers and weeds have been allowed to remain and the garden bears little resemblance to the majority of meticulously tended backyards on the East End. "One reason for allowing weeds to remain is that they cut down on wind blow and evaporation and hold down erosion," explains Smith. "In our way of farming it was subsistence. In native cultures once it was planted the garden was only visited two or three times before harvest and was weeded only around the area of the hills. So we decided to leave it and let it go."

It may be of some comfort to East End gardeners to know that the Native American Garden is not immune to deer. "They bit off the tops of some of the sunflowers. But instead of dying they grew back with three or four seed heads," says Smith. "Some people think animals and plants have a conscious plan to evolve."

"Liz Bowser meticulously sprinkled red pepper on the leaves of all the plants and that seems to have deterred the deer," notes Smith. As an extra precaution, aluminum pans were tied to the uprights of a log and leaf shelter Smith built in the center of the medicine wheel garden. They bang against the posts in the breeze and seem to help keep hungry animals away. "In native cultures the shelters were occupied by women and children whose job it was to frighten off any predators. The shelter represents the place where women and children would live on the garden site," says Smith. "It was an around the clock job, every day. That's the way native Americans kept deer away, not exactly scientific. I can't do that though, I have to tend to my computer."

The project has relied heavily on volunteers to help with the effort. Scott Chaskey, manager of the Quail Hill Farm and Steve Storch, owner of Bayview Tree Movers brought in heavy equipment to mow, plow and disk the area. Ten volunteers have spent the summer weeding, planting and clearing walkways. Four of them are credit students from Southampton College enrolled in Professor John Strong's

Taste It

If you'd like to sample native American cuisine, be sure to stop by the 50th Annual Shinnecock Indian Labor Day Pow Wow this weekend in Southampton. Lamont Smith, a member of the Shinnecock Nation and director of the Native American Garden Project in Accabonac, will be offering some of his traditional native food to visitors all weekend long.

"The Pow Wow is a family tradition and people have been coming for years," says Smith. "I plan to combine all the products from the garden and offer Shinnecock shell fish from local waters along with some of the traditions that go with it." Some of the dishes Smith will be serving are Shinnecock oysters and clams, pickled alewife and samp, a hominy corn and bean stew.

The 50th Annual Pow Wow gets under way at 10 a.m. this Saturday and runs through Monday. In addition to the native food, there will be music, dancing, native arts and crafts and storytelling. Shinnecock Indian Reservation is off Old Montauk Highway just west of Southampton Village. Saturday and Sunday hours are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday 10 to 6.

course, *The Algonquin Peoples of Long Island from earliest times to 1700*. "They are gung-ho," says Elizabeth Bowser of the volunteers currently working the garden. "But we are really in need of many more to help with all sorts of tasks."

Next year Bowser and Smith plan to expand the project by incorporating on site educational projects. Children's programs, an Indian garden quilt and the building of rustic log benches are all on the drawing board, dependent upon future grant money and the assistance of eager volunteers. Bowser also plans to illustrate native cooking techniques such as the pitcook, an early version of the clambake, where lobsters, clams, mussels, corn and vegetables are cooked in a pit between layers of seaweed.

"The whole garden is native American based, but we're multi-generational and ethnic," says Bowser.