

AGRICULTURE IN WISCONSIN: A.D. 1000

This garden represents what a Native American garden in Wisconsin may have looked like 1000 years ago.

Agriculture is believed to have begun independently in many different places around the world. One of those locations was eastern North America. By 4000 years ago, Native Americans living in eastern North America had domesticated five indigenous plants: squash, gourd, sumpweed, sunflower, and goosefoot. Three, perhaps four, other plants were heavily used and may have been domesticated as well. Seeds from erect knotweed, little barley, maygrass, and giant ragweed are often found in direct association with the plants that are known to have been cultivated. Evidence indicates that many of these oily and starchy seeds had been in use for at least 2000 years prior to being domesticated.

The transition to food growing in eastern North America was a natural enhancement of existing Native American plant harvesting. This gradual shift occurred over an extended period of time.

Corn was introduced into Wisconsin 1800 years ago. By the year 1000, it had become an important food. Reliance on corn increased over time, even as people continued to grow the older crops and harvest plant foods from the forests and prairies. Hunting, trapping, and fishing were also part of their broad based mixed economy.

The common bean first appears in Wisconsin around the year 1200. Its cultivation added an important source of nitrogen for the soil and protein for the gardeners.

This food pantry garden is a partnership between the Town of Middleton, the Cross Plains School District, and the Wisconsin Historical Society.