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'The Three Sisters' of Butte Gardens

Belinda Brooks

Butte Tribe members are preparing the earth for the 2022 Butte Gardens. From tilling, fertilizing, irrigation prep and planting, the active members of the tribe are working to make this year's family gardens as beautiful as hundreds of years before. Crops planted this year are squash, okra, mustard greens, turnips, tomatoes, peppers, Indian corn, sweet corn, purple hull peas, snap beans, Roman bush beans, radishes, cucumbers, watermelons and cantaloupe.

For Chief Collum, his training in growing Butte family gardens began early. From six through eight years old, he was raised with the concept that gardens don't wait for anyone; they must be worked every day.

Collum's grandparents, Chief Clarence and Louella Waters Desadier, and great-grandparents, Chief Adolph Felix and Victoria "Fee" Flores Desadier, are credited with teaching their grandson oral history and tribal traditions. From these ancestors, Collum learned the Legend of the Three Sisters and incorporated the knowledge he gained to plant his gardens.

What was it about Collum that the family elders always called him to plant the gardens when he was a child? Collum was born loving his elders.

He could never get enough of listening and asking questions about family and life skills. The elders understood the depths of his love of family, so at age 16 he took charge of the garden creations.

For Butte Tribe, Collum explained the Three Sisters Garden is a companion planting of corn, beans, and squash grown in the same area at the same time. When the corn reaches 4 to 5 inches tall, running beans are planted. Two weeks later squash is planted. According to Collum, the corn stalks become the polls for the beans to climb. The corn and beans shade the squash, which drowns out the grass. To keep the wind from breaking the squash stem, Collum piles dirt up around the stem to support it.

In earlier days, when fertilizer was not affordable, Collum remembers fishing for red-horses (carp) and gasper goo to use for fertilizer. He cut the fish into three large pieces and buried them deep in the ground.

Collum related other secrets in planting Butte Gardens that he learns from the almanac: never plant on a full moon and do not plant on Good Friday. If you do so, the plants will make beautiful blooms but will not bare vegetables or fruit.

It is said the ground



Chief Rodger Collum heads up his team of Butte Indians in preparing the grounds for the 2022 Butte Gardens.



Joseph Keith Hernandez, Chief Collum's number one field hand and sidekick, gets to work planting



One of several Butte Garden spots is shown with active Butte Tribe members planting this year's crops. From left are Bobby Desadier, James Aligor and Keith Hernandez.

bleeds on Good Friday. Collum plants tribal gardens between April 14 and April 25. He never plants seeds any deeper than one-half inch in the ground.

For okra, Collum wraps seeds in a washcloth and puts a rubber band around it. He

then soaks the seeds for three days in Clorox bleach. When the seeds have white fuzz, it's time to plant. The okra will grow better and last until the second frost of the year.

Butte Gardens are shared with tribal

members at no cost as a part of the Louisiana State 2022 Butte Tribe Emergency Preparedness and Healthy Tribe Initiative Action Plan.

To learn more about Butte Gardens and Butte Tribe History, go to Buttetribe.org or

join us on Facebook. Butte Tribe is a non-profit organization. To donate to Butte Tribe, mail check or money order to Butte Tribe, 1458 Hwy 1226, Natchitoches, LA 71457, or PayPal – buttetribe@gmail.com.