

Sustainability Spotlight: The Three Sisters Garden

By Melyssa Allen

One of the most visible examples of Meredith's sustainability efforts is the College's community garden.

Known as the Three Sisters Garden, it is open to all members of the Meredith community. The project is led by Associate Professor of Human Environmental Sciences Bill Landis, who was inspired to create the garden during a sabbatical in which he studied sustainable agriculture.

Landis sees the garden as a way to bring attention to the connections between the health of the environment and human health, and the benefits of a stronger local food system, food accessibility and the development of an equitable food supply.

"I thought operating a garden on our campus would be a terrific way to create awareness of these issues, provide experiences for students to reconnect with their local food and how it is produced, provide opportunities for individuals to grow their own food, to educate on sustainability issues, and enrich the food and nutrition program," Landis said.

The garden's name, which was suggested by Media Services Director John Kincheloe, refers to the ancient Native American practice of planting a trio of food crops—corn, beans and squash—together.

"They discovered that this combination of plants act synergistically to boost overall food production, suppress weeds, and maintain soil fertility and, by using this technique, created a sustainable means of producing food year after year," Landis said.

There are plans to plant the "three sisters" this spring.

"It should be interesting to see first-hand this truly ancient and exquisite agricultural technique, which so nicely models sustainability," Landis said.

There are a variety of ways for faculty, staff and students to get involved in the garden this spring, including preparing garden beds, planting, harvesting, watering, planning for future projects, and garden construction. Individuals or small groups can adopt plots for their own use.

"The garden needs people with interest and enthusiasm that can bring new ideas that will keep the garden evolving and dynamic," Landis said.