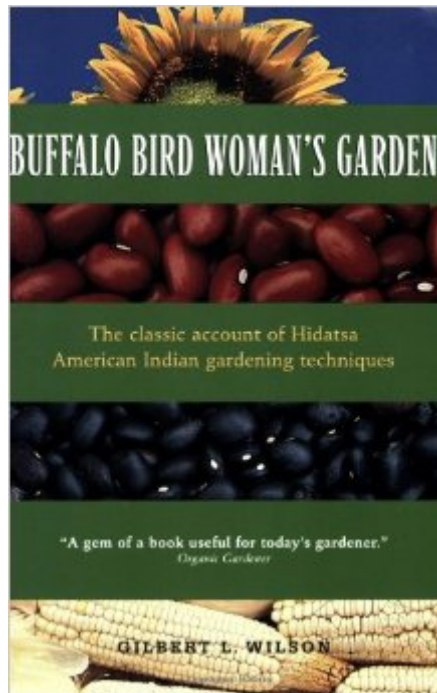


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# Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture Of The Hidatsa Indians (Borealis Books)



## Synopsis

Buffalo Bird Woman, a Hidatsa Indian born about 1839, was an expert gardener. Following centuries-old methods, she and the women of her family raised huge crops of corn, squash, beans, and sunflowers on the rich bottomlands of the Missouri River in what is now North Dakota. When she was young, her fields were near Like-a-fishhook, the earth-lodge village that the Hidatsa shared with the Mandan and Arikara. When she grew older, the families of the three tribes moved to individual allotments on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. In *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden*, first published in 1917, anthropologist Gilbert L. Wilson transcribed the words of this remarkable woman, whose advice today's gardeners can still follow. She describes a year of activities, from preparing and planting the fields through cultivating, harvesting, and storing foods. She gives recipes for cooking typical Hidatsa dishes. And she tells of the stories, songs, and ceremonies that were essential to a bountiful harvest. A new introduction by anthropologist and ethnobotanist Jeffery R. Hanson describes the Hidatsa people's ecologically sound methods of gardening and Wilson's work with this traditional gardener. Praise for *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden*: "A gem of a book useful for today's gardener." — "Organic Gardener" "One of the best gardening books around." — "City Pages" "Every gardener and agricultural scientist should find gems of practical wisdom in these pages, borne from an age-old tradition when sustainable agricultural practices . . . made the difference in sustaining life. Fascinating!" — "Foster's Botanical & Herb Review" "Historical photographs and diagrams of farming techniques, along with actual recipes and Hidatsa vegetable varieties, make this gem of a book useful for today's gardener." — "Organic Gardening"

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a Minnesota Historical Society reprint of the anthropological study done by Gilbert Wilson in 1917, originally published as "Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians: An Indian Interpretation." Wilson was among the first of a new school of American anthropologists that felt Indian cultures should speak for themselves, and not be spoken for by "white man's" interpretations. Consequently, the book really is, as the subtitle says, "an Indian interpretation." Most of the text is translated directly from Buffalo Bird Woman's own words, complete with stories, jokes, and personal anecdotes about village life. By the time you are done reading it, you will feel as if you met her personally. I bought it because I am a Minnesota gardener, so I wanted to see what tips I might pick up from the ways of the indigenous people. The book is rich with useful gardening lore, including diagrams of various tools and structures, along with detailed descriptions of the different kinds of beans, corn, and squash that the Indians grew. Plus, there are native recipes you can try. I was surprised to learn that, when the Indians dried squash, they didn't use mature fruits with hard skins like we do today, but preferred to cut them when they were 4 days old -- at about 3 1/2 inches diameter. They were more tender that way, easier to slice, and they dried better. The best squashes were marked in the field and allowed to mature for seed. I also found it interesting that the Indians kept the different colors of corn separate, not like the multi-colored "Indian corn" we buy today for fall decorations.

Originally published in 1917, reissued in 1987, now released again with a new introduction by Jeffrey R. Hansen, Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden presents an agricultural calendar year's activities as remembered by Buffalo Bird Woman, an accomplished Hidatsa gardener born around 1839. Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden was a doctoral dissertation by a man who believed "It is of no importance that an Indian's war costume struck the Puritan as the Devil's scheme to frighten the heart out of the Lord's anointed. What we want to know is why the Indian donned the costume, and his reasons for doing it (p.xix)." Wilson also went on to write Goodbird the Indian His Story and Waheenee: An Indian Girl's Story (biography of Buffalo Bird Woman, 1839-1921). Using biography to study a culture was effective because it highlighted the variety of traumatic cultural shifts, changes, and transmutations painfully experienced by Buffalo Bird Woman and her family. The use of empathy informs the dated, 'superior' dominant culture outlook. Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden

has been called a classic anthropological document. It certainly is that and more. As a model of respectful viewing and learning, as a mirror of the complex lifeway of the agricultural Plains Indians, as a chronicle of human adaptation, survival and ingenuity in the face of cultural disenfranchisement, Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden sets the bar for the standard. In addition, it gives eloquent testimony to one of the enduring gifts of the Hidatsa - their varieties of corn, squash, beans, and sunflowers. Even more enduring, perhaps, is the contribution highlighted by Jeffrey Hanson: "Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden is not the end, but the beginning."

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