



Importance of Botanical and Community Gardens on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation

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Introduction

The Northern Cheyenne were a Great Lakes tribe, but were slowly pushed westward by more aggressive tribes until they settled in Montana after arduous journeys (Weist 1977). On the way to Montana, about 1675, the Cheyenne lived in SW Minnesota in long houses, had gardens and stored part of their harvests (Weist 1977). Northern Cheyenne share very strong ties to their community as a whole. Much cultural identity has been lost due to forced assimilation to Euro-American cultures. Few speak Cheyenne fluently (Chief Dull Knife College 2008). Most are dependent on government food stamps and other subsidies. Family values have started to degrade. Many Cheyenne have turned to alcohol and drugs. Most Northern Cheyenne do not have jobs outside the home or ranch. Obesity and diabetes are increasing at an incredible rate on the reservation.

Hypothesis Tested

Construction and use of botanical gardens and community gardens will bring a sense of purpose to the Cheyenne, raise morale, and help renew the Northern Cheyenne cultural identity.

Methods and Materials

Seventy eight peer-refereed journal articles were obtained and examined (Table 1). AGSC 465R students lived on the reservation and used the holistic process (Savory and Butterfield 1999) in discussions with tribal members. In-depth interviews of 7 Northern Cheyenne tribe members were conducted by phone and e-mail. All interviewees lived and/or worked on the reservation.

Table 1. Peer Refereed Search for Information on Community Gardens and Botanical Gardens as they Relate to the Northern Cheyenne.

Data Base	Key Word or Phrases	Hits
CatSearch	Northern Cheyenne Botanical Gardens	48
	Native American Botanical Gardens	14
	Native American Community Gardens	8
	Northern Cheyenne Community Gardens	0
	Native American Outdoors Programs	6
	Native American Wilderness Learning	2



Fig. 2. Northern Cheyenne and Cultural Center media specialist, Josette Woodenlegs, Gretchen, and AGSC 465R classmates at the Cultural Center, Lame Deer MT discuss cultural ways.



Fig. 4. Elder Mina Seminole, explains Northern Cheyenne history for Gretchen and her AGSC 465R classmates at Northern Cheyenne Cultural Center.



Fig. 3 on left. Pond at the Botanical Garden Site, center of town, Lame Deer, MT.

Fig. 6 below. Meredith Tallbull shares his design for the Botanical Garden in Lame Deer with Little Big Horn Community Garden team and AGSC 465R students during visit to Little Big Horn College campus, Crow Agency MT.



Fig. 5 Meredith Tallbull, Northern Cheyenne tribal member, CDKC student, founder/manager of Northern Cheyenne Botanical Park/Garden



Fig. 7 Colleague of Meredith, Francesca Pine, Greenhouse Manager at the Community Garden, Little Big Horn College, Crow Reservation, Crow Agency MT, explains to MSU grad student from Mongolia and AGSC 465 R students how this demonstration garden works.

Interview questions:

- What do you feel the desired quality of life is right now on the reservation?
- What do you think are resources needed to achieve this quality of life?
- Do you think the Botanical Garden initiated by Meredith can be a resource to help achieve this desired quality of life, or, do you think it will have a negative effect?
- What other resources do you think needs to be produced to achieve the desired quality of life on the reservation?

Results

During the holistic process, interviewees described their quality of life as family closeness, health, and spiritual connection with the earth. Interviewees shared that:

- Health and family closeness were currently not ideal and this affected their spirituality
- Resources needed to attain desired quality of life did not include the US Government
- Lack of their desired quality of life on the reservation is degrading and affecting overall health of the Northern Cheyenne and their cultural identity
- They feel that they are in poor health, are not sufficiently physically active, have very little spirituality and religion, and that family closeness is suffering because of this.

Discussion

From interviews and literature reviews it seems entirely feasible that the Northern Cheyenne can improve their quality of life with the botanical and community garden project. Not only will it allow all the community to have a chance to work with their hands and reconnect with the earth, but it will also be a learning environment where all people in the community can learn why it is important to reconnect with the earth and their sacred plants and medicines and why they need to learn these things to be able to hold onto their cultural identity. It is not an overnight process and will take a long time to see results, but as the Botanical Garden continues to grow and expand, children will take their learning and apply it at ever higher levels of schooling and in their everyday life and build upon their experiences in a positive way. Positive results will show that it works and encourage future generations that there is a whole wide world waiting for them on the Reservation if they just open their eyes, and have a willingness to learn, change, and be leaders so that they can take pride in the fact that they are Northern Cheyenne. The Botanical Gardens can help young generations know who they are, where they came from, and now know where they are going.

Recommendations

- Find Northern Cheyenne on Reservation with useful skills (carpentry, gardening, etc.) and who are willing to donate time to help get the garden going.
- Start photographic journal to show changes made and to track progress.
- Recruit teachers from elementary school across the street from Botanical Garden, Lame Deer High School, and CDKC to donate some of their time to give demonstrations and short classes to the school children.
- Involve community members to build interest and enthusiasm for the gardens.

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Fig. 1. Dr. Dunkel and AGSC 465R Health, Poverty, Agriculture: Concepts and Action Research students pause on the Chief Dull Knife College Lame Deer, MT, campus to diagram results of holistic process discussions.