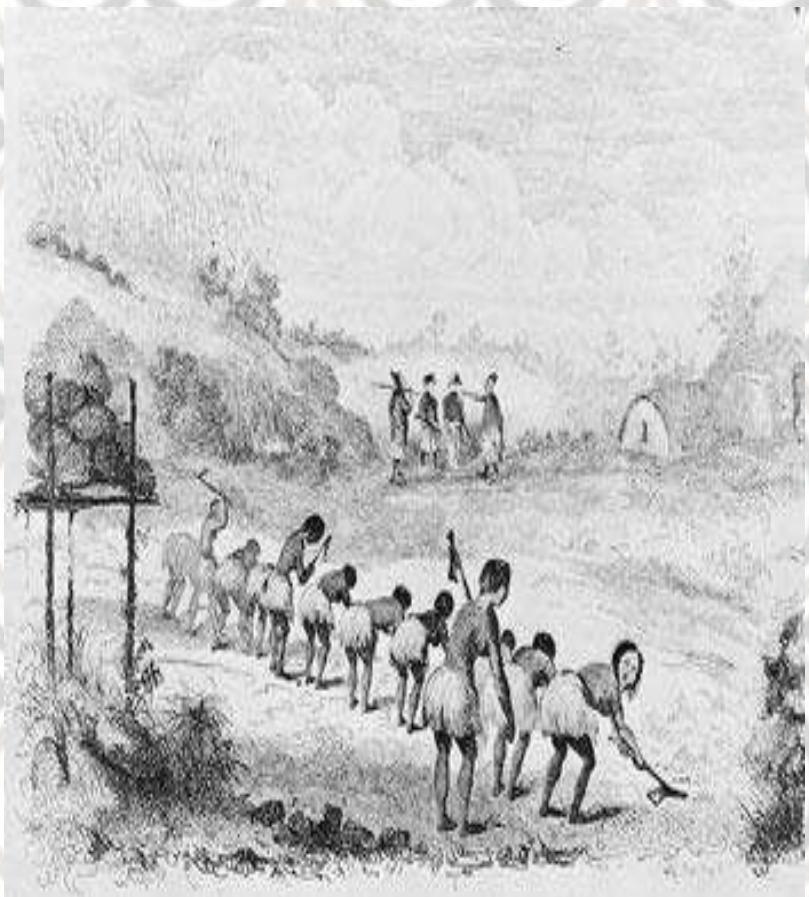


Traditional Maori Garden



Before Europeans arrived in New Zealand, Māori grew crop plants that the first Polynesian settlers brought from tropical Polynesia. European explorers observed that Māori had neat gardens, about 0.5–5 hectares in size, on sunny, north-facing slopes. These gardens were communally owned and worked. Kūmara (sweet potato) was the main crop, and could be grown throughout the northern and coastal North Island, and in the northern South Island. Four other important food plants – taro, yam, gourd and tī pore (Pacific cabbage tree) – were confined to northern gardens.

Gardening methods

Before planting, Māori cleared and burned forest, and prepared the ground. They spread ash over the garden and added sand and gravel to heavy loam and clay soils. Usually the land was not completely dug over. Instead, the gardeners formed the earth into small mounds for planting kūmara, or scooped it into shallow hollows for growing taro or gourd.

They used the garden for two to six years and then left it fallow for several years, during which time a cover of fast-growing native shrubs developed.



Gardening Tools

Tools were made from hard woods such as kānuka and akeake, and were designed to poke and prod the soil, rather than turn over clods of earth. Cultivation was labour-intensive, especially on poor and hard soils.



Kanuka



Akeake

Toki (Adze)

One of the most important tools were toki (adzes). The majority of early adzes were made from basalt and other hard rock like adzite (baked argillite) and greywacke. Later adzes were made from greywacke or basalt in the North Island and nephrite (pounamu, or greenstone) in the South Island. Prized stone was traded extensively.





Kō (Digging stick)

The kō was the main tool Māori used for digging. The 2–3-metre-long pole was made of strong and durable wood. One end was shaped into a narrow blade, and a footrest was lashed to the shaft. Kō were used for loosening soil and shaping the ground into mounds for planting tubers (kumara, potato, taro etc)

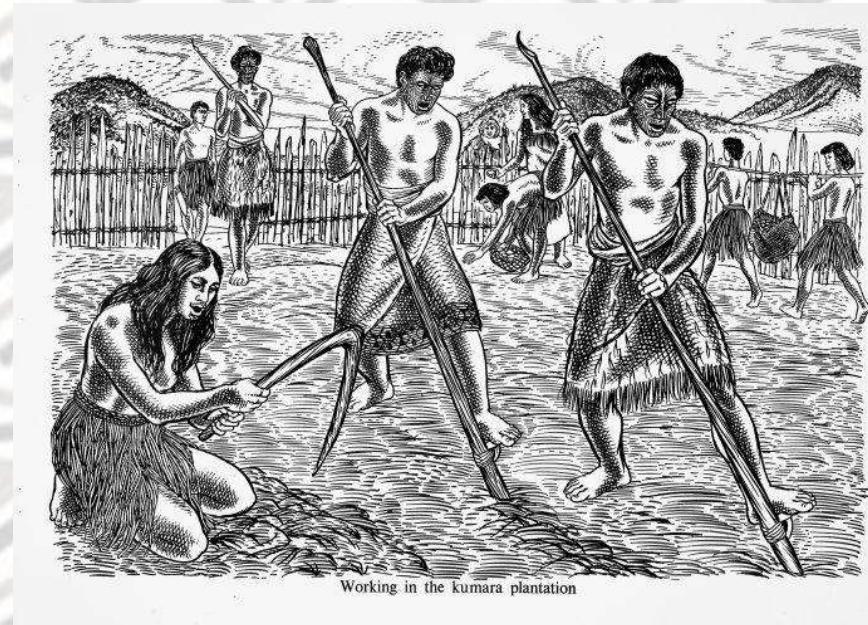
Timo (a type of grubber)



Kūmara (sweet potato)

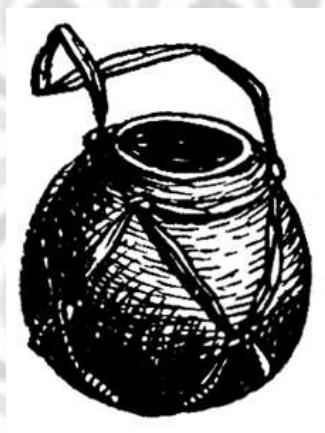
Kumara became a major source of food for Māori. They performed many rituals when planting it, which were thought to ensure the crop's success.

The plants were grown in mounds, and harvested kūmara were stored in underground pits during winter. Early varieties were far smaller than the kūmara we eat today.



Hue (bottle gourd)

Hue were grown for its fruit, which were eaten when small, or made into containers for food or water when large. Hue plants needed moist soil, so they were grown in hollows. The trailing plants may have twined up stakes or over houses.



Demarest Museum Collection
Java Islands. - Gourd container in which 'Nasi, rice', were prepared. These decorated vessels
containing perfumed rice were placed before important guests.

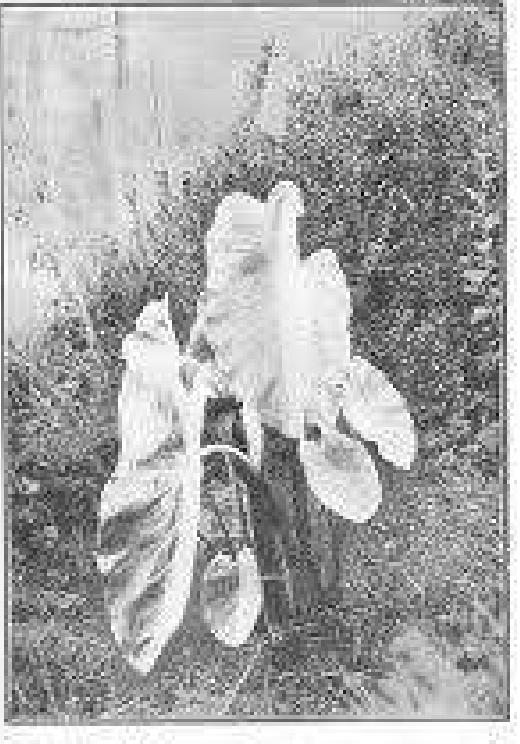
Aute (paper mulberry)

Aute is a small tree, found throughout Polynesia, where the bark was used to make tapa cloth. It did not do so well in New Zealand, and only small amounts of cloth were produced.



Taro

Taro was sometimes grown in swamps, with drainage channels dug out. The starchy tuber was seen as a special food for chiefs and other important people.



Uwhi (yams)

Uwhi or Yams have a long growing period, and probably did not do well in New Zealand. They were replaced by potatoes and other vegetables brought from Europe.



Tī pore(Pacific cabbage tree)

Tī pore was grown for its root, which was cooked in a hāngī (earth oven) and eaten. It was probably grown only in the far north of New Zealand. Māori also cooked and ate the root of the native New Zealand cabbage tree, but did not cultivate it in their gardens.