Crops Before Corn

The Native Americans who lived in Illinois started to domesticate local plants 7,000 years ago. They used these plants as food and as tools for thousands of years before they began growing corn and beans, which were new crops that had originally come from Central America.

Oily Seeds
Sumpweed and Sunflower

Sumpweed and sunflower seeds provided dietary fat. Sunflower is the only plant that was originally domesticated in the United States that remains under domestication today.

Starchy Seeds
Goosefoot, Erect Knotweed, Maygrass, and Little Barley

These four plants were a major part of Native American diets before the introduction of corn. They were important nutritionally and ceremonially.

Technological Plants
Squash, Bottle Gourds, and Tobacco
Squash was the first cultigen to be grown in Illinois. Squash and bottle gourds could be used as containers and as food. Tobacco had important religious and medicinal uses.

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