

Companion Planting

Companion planting is the relationship between plants and insects and is the safest, natural way to garden organically.

Companion planting is also about planting certain vegetables, herbs and flowers in your garden that attract certain pests that feed on harmful, undesirable pests. For example, perennial yarrow attracts ladybugs that consume masses of aphids. The lacewing that feeds on aphids, mealy bugs, mites and scale needs lots of pollen from flowers and evergreens for shelter. Wasps and bees are also beneficial to the garden. Even the prehistoric looking preying mantis is a friend. When you create a natural balance in your garden you'll discover how much better everything grows and you won't need to worry about damaging the environment.

If all vegetables, herbs and flowers you plant in your garden bed are the same, then they will compete for exactly the same nutrients at exactly the same root depths. Planting plants that have different root-depths next to each other ensures that the plants are not searching for nutrients in the same areas. Therefore, if you plant a row of lettuce, then a row of carrots, then a row or tomatoes you are reducing the competition between these plants because their roots will be accessing nutrients from different areas.

Deep rooted herbs like comfrey, borage and dandelion collect nutrients from deep in your soil and hold a large variety of nutrients in their leaves. These leaves can be chopped off and lightly dug back into your soil to act as a natural fertiliser for your nearby plants.

Peas, beans and clover collect nitrogen from the atmosphere and convert it into bioavailable form inside root nodules. It is a great idea to plant these nitrogen fixers next to leafy vegetables because leafy vegetables are known to require a lot of nitrogen.

You can also companion plant your vegetables. The following is a list of vegetables and their ideal planting companions; also the list lets you know which vegetables don't like each other so don't plant them together.

- Beans like celery and cucumbers but dislike onions and fennel.
- Beets are compatible with bush beans, lettuce, onions, kohlrabi, and most members of the cabbage family. Keep pole beans and mustard away from them.
- Cabbage, celery, dill, onions, and potatoes are good companion plants. Dislikes include strawberries, tomatoes, and pole beans.
- Carrots, lettuce, radish, onions, and tomatoes like each other, but dill doesn't, so plant it at the other end of the garden.
- Corn prefers to be near pumpkins, peas, beans, Squash, cucumbers, and potatoes but keep tomatoes away.
- Cucumbers like sweet corn, peas, radishes, beans, and sunflowers, but dislikes include aromatic herbs and potatoes.
- Lettuce grows especially well with onions and is also compatible with strawberries, carrots, radishes, and cucumbers.
- Onions can be planted near lettuce, beetroot, strawberries, and tomatoes but keep well away from peas and beans.
- Peas, carrots, cucumbers, sweet corn, turnips, radishes, beans, potatoes, and aromatic herbs are good companions. Keep peas away from onions, garlic, leek, and shallots.
- Radish grows well with beetroot, carrots, spinach, parsnip, cucumbers, and beans. Avoid planting near cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, or turnips.

- Squash can be planted with cucumbers and corn.
- Tomatoes, carrots, onions, and parsley are good companion plants. Basil improves growth and flavour. Keep cabbage and cauliflower away from them.

Confusing Pests with Companion Planting

Pests recognize their food by either its shape or its scent. Most of our gardens are like supermarkets to pests. If you plant your vegetables and herbs in a straight neat weed less row then the pests wander up and down taking a bit of this and a bit of that. You need to confuse your pests. Don't plant your food in straight rows. Mix your plantings up so you don't have blocks of any one shape or scent that are similar. Plant flowers among your vegetables and plant vegetables among your flowers. This will give you a productive and beautiful pest deceiving garden. Planting strong smelling plants like nasturtiums, wormwood, rosemary and lavender nearby will also help confuse your pests.

We can use our plants to create shade for each other. Lettuce and celery for example do not like our long afternoon summer sun. On the other hand, eggplant and capsicums love the long afternoon summer sun. Therefore, if you plant lettuce amongst your eggplant and capsicum, lettuce will be protected by the shade of the eggplant and capsicum, which in turn will enjoy the full sun. You can also read my article on "Three Sisters".

Marigolds

Marigolds are easy to grow and they help keep the aphids away. Their pungent foliage deters insects and their roots discourage soil-dwelling nematodes, which attack tomatoes, potatoes, roses and strawberries. The root of marigolds produces a chemical that kills nematodes as they enter the soil. If a whole area is infested, at the end of the season, turn the Marigolds under so the roots will decay in the soil. You can safely plant there again the following spring.

Marigolds can also be used as a thick barrier to suppress any couch grass. A thick hedge of comfrey can also keep out kikuyu. The comfrey dies down each winter about the same time that kikuyu stops growing. You can also slash comfrey three to four times each summer and use for wonderfully rich mulch. Don't ever dig around comfrey as it will spread.