

Companion Planting



It is not normal for any living thing to grow in isolation, or in contact with only others of the same kind. Diversity and interconnection are basic ecological principles. Companion planting creates a diversity of species within the garden. Carefully arranged plants assist each other's growth by reducing pest numbers and creating favorable growing conditions..

Scent

Strongly scented herbs mask the scent of other plants, confusing pests, which identify their targets by smell. Example: broccoli and cabbage will suffer less damage from the caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly when planted among sage, rosemary or dill.

Attracting Predators

Providing food and habitat for insects that are predators or parasites of insects that damage plants can reduce pest numbers. Example: parsnip flowers are a food for parasitic wasps.

Repelling or killing pests

Some plants are toxic to pests. Example: French marigolds will kill off some harmful nematode species.

Altering appearance

Flying pests often identify their food supply by its shape. Growing different plants closely together means that there are no distinctive outlines for pests to identify. Example: weeds grown amongst mung beans keep down beanfly numbers.

Shelter

A carefully placed stand of taller plants creates a sheltered spot by providing shade and alleviating wind. Example: plant corn near pumpkins.

Support

The stalks and branches of a large sturdy plant can support a climber. Example: sweet peas climbing through the low-lying branches of an orange tree.

Nitrogen fixing

Leguminous plants host bacteria in their roots. These bacteria fix nitrogen, supplying this nutrient to their hosts and indirectly, to neighbouring plants. Example: clover grown around cauliflower.

Allelopathy

Substances released from plants into the soil can affect the growth of neighbouring plants. Many plants inhibit the growth of others, but a few enhance it. Example: plants promoting the growth of others nearby include nettle, calendula, yarrow and (planted sparingly) chamomile.

Minerals

Deep-rooted plants draw up minerals from the subsoil, returning them to the topsoil. Example: comfrey draws up potassium, which is released into the soil as the leaves die off in late autumn.

Bad Companions

Plants to avoid planting near others include large trees, (particularly conifers, eucalypts and walnuts), strongly bitter herbs (wormwood, southernwood, tansy, rue) and heavy feeders which may also release growth inhibitors (brassicac, sweet corn, sunflowers).

Intercropping

Save space by growing small, quick growing vegetables between larger slower growing ones. The small vegetables can be harvested before the larger ones claim their growing space.

Guilds

A small number of plants which all grow well together is called a guild. A common three-plant combination is sweet corn, pumpkin and climbing bean. A common four-plant combination is tomato, basil, marigold, and lettuce.

Other factors to consider when deciding what to plant with what include: size, growth rate, root depth and type, nutritional needs, soil conditions, soil type and watering needs.