

Companion Planting



Learn to pair plants for a diverse and healthy garden.

Organic gardeners know that a diverse mix of plants makes for a healthy and beautiful garden. Many also believe that certain plant combinations have extraordinary (some even believe mysterious) powers for helping each other grow. Scientific study of companion planting has confirmed that some combinations have real benefits unique to those combinations. And practical experience has demonstrated to many gardeners how to mate certain plants for their mutual benefit.

12 Clever Combinations

Tomatoes and cabbage: Tomatoes are repellent to diamondback moth larvae, which are caterpillars that chew large holes in cabbage leaves.

Cucumbers and nasturtiums: The nasturtium's vining stems make them a great companion rambling among the cucumbers and squash, suggests Sally Jean Cunningham, master gardener and author of *Great Garden Companions*. Nasturtiums "are reputed to repel cucumber beetles, but I depend on them more as habitat for predatory insects," such as spiders and ground beetles.

Peppers and pigweed or ragweed: Leaf miners preferred the weeds to pepper plants in a study at the Coastal Plains Experiment Station in Tifton, Georgia. Just be careful to remove the weeds' flowers before they set seed or you'll have trouble controlling the weeds.

Cabbage and dill: "Dill is a great companion for cabbage family plants, such as broccoli and Brussels sprouts," Cunningham says. "The cabbages support the floppy dill," while the dill attracts the tiny beneficial wasps that control imported cabbageworms and other cabbage pests.

Corn and beans: The beans attract beneficial insects that prey on corn pests such as leafhoppers, fall armyworms and leaf beetles. And bean vines climb up the corn stalks.

Lettuce and tall flowers: Nicotiana (flowering tobacco) and cleome (spider flower) give lettuce the light shade it grows best in.

Radishes and spinach: Radishes attract leaf miners away from the spinach. The damage the leaf miners do to radish leaves doesn't prevent the radishes from growing nicely underground.

Potatoes and sweet alyssum: The sweet alyssum has tiny flowers that attract delicate beneficial insects, such as predatory wasps. Plant sweet alyssum alongside bushy crops like potatoes, or let it spread to form a living ground cover under arching plants like broccoli. Bonus: The alyssum's sweet fragrance will scent your garden all summer.

Cauliflower and dwarf zinnias: The nectar from the dwarf zinnias lures ladybugs and other predators that help protect cauliflower.

Roses and chives: Gardeners have been planting garlic with roses for eons, because garlic is said to repel rose pests. Garlic chives probably are just as repellent, and their small purple or white flowers in late spring looks great with rose flowers and foliage. (*Nigella damascena*) looks wonderful planted in the center of a wide row of strawberries," Cunningham says.

Collards and catnip: Studies have found that planting catnip alongside collards reduces flea-beetle damage on the collards.

Strawberries and love-in-a-mist: Tall, blue-flowered "love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*) looks wonderful planted in the center of a wide row of strawberries," Cunningham says.

HOW DOES COMPANION PLANTING WORK?

- **Companions help each other grow**—Tall plants, for example, provide shade for sun-sensitive shorter plants.
- **Companions use garden space efficiently**—Vining plants cover the ground, upright plants grow up. Two plants in one patch.
- **Companions prevent pest problems**—Plants like onions repel some pests. Other plants can lure pests away from more desirable plants.
- **Companions attract beneficial insects**—Every successful garden needs plants that attract the predators of pests.

Companion Planting

Companion planting is based around the idea that certain plants can benefit others when planted next to, or close to one another.

Companion planting exists to benefit certain plants by giving them pest control, naturally without the need to use chemicals, and in some cases they can give a higher crop yield .

Generally, companion planting is thought of as a small-scale gardening practice, but it can be applied on larger-scale operations. It has been proven that by having a beneficial crop in a nearby field that attracts certain insects away from a neighbouring field that has the main crop can prove very beneficial. This action is called trap cropping.

While companion planting has a long history, the benefits of companion planting have not always been understood. Traditional recommendations, for companion planting have been used by gardeners for a long time, but recent tests are proving scientifically, that they work.

Other ways that companion planting can be beneficial is to plant a crop like any Legumes, on an area where it will feed nitrogen into the soil, then it will not be necessary to use any chemical fertilizers for the next crop.

The African marigold, along with other plants, are well known for companion planting, as they exude chemicals from their roots or aerial parts that suppress or repel pests and protect neighbouring plants.

Companion planting also exists in a physical way. For example, tall-growing, sun-loving plants may share space with lower-growing, shade-tolerant species, resulting in higher total yields from the land. This is called spatial interaction, and can also yield pest control benefits, for example, the presence of the prickly vines is said to discourage raccoons from ravaging sweet corn.

Another type of companion planting is called Nurse cropping, where tall or dense-canopied plants may protect more vulnerable plants through shading or by providing a windbreak. For example, oats have long been used to help establish alfalfa and other forages by supplanting the more competitive weeds that would otherwise grow in their place. In many instances, nurse cropping is simply another form of physical-spatial interaction.

Beneficial habitats-sometimes called refugia-are another type of companion planting that has received a lot of attention in recent years. The benefit is derived when companion plants provide a good environment for beneficial insects, and other arthropods, especially those predatory and parasitic species that help to keep pest populations in check.

Companion Planting is enjoyable and rewarding.