

Companion Gardening by Pat Heshka



In more recent years I have enjoyed experimenting with a companion garden. Much of what the gardening community knows about companion planting has been learned through trial and error.

A garden can become more productive if one employs the principles of companion planting. Companion planting encompasses all of the relationships between plants that grow near or with each other. The key is in knowing which of those relationships are beneficial and which can be harmful. Some varieties benefit by being cultivated with others because of the nutrients they can provide to the soil and the companion plants.

Other plants provide support or shade for a different variety grown in close proximity – such as leaf lettuce inserted around tomatoes. As the tomatoes grow they provide valuable shade to the lettuce crop, and the lettuce covers the soil as a live mulch.

Yet another benefit can be that some plants deter pests and insects from attacking others. For example, marigolds are well known to kill off nematodes, repel whiteflies and deter rabbits when planted as a border around the vegetable garden. Cucumbers seem to be offensive to racoons so it is good to plant them near your corn.

Companion gardening has been around for centuries. One of the most widely known and practiced companion plantings ever, the planting of corn, beans and squash together, also known as "The Three Sisters", dates back to the Iroquois. They knew the trio worked in harmony and practiced the method exclusively as a way to increase their yields. The beans fix the nitrogen in the soil, which corn needs and uses to thrive. The corn provides a natural trellis system for the beans to grow upon and the bean vines provide extra strength to the corn stalks to prevent them from blowing over in the wind. The squash vines act as a living mulch on the soil, helping to hold in moisture, repel weeds, and even more important, make it hard for animals like a raccoon to track through to get at the corn.

Corn, beans, and squash also complement each other nutritionally. Corn provides carbohydrates, the dried beans are rich in protein, balancing the lack of necessary amino acids found in corn. Finally, squash yields both vitamins from the fruit and healthful, delicious oil from the seeds.

An article by Burpee recommends that you avoid planting vegetables in large patches or long rows and interplant with flowers and herbs. Large groupings of one type of vegetable serve as a beacon to problematic pests. If you mix flowers and herbs, it becomes more difficult for pests to find your veggies. The scent of the flowers and herbs attracts beneficial insects to your garden.

Sometimes plants may be helpful to one another only at a certain stage of their growth. The number and ratio of different plants growing together is often a factor in their compatibility, and

sometimes plants make good companions for no apparent reason.

You would think that keeping a garden weed-free would be a good thing, but this is not always the case. Certain weeds pull nutrients from deep in the soil and bring them close to the surface. When the weeds die and decompose, nutrients become available in the surface soil and are more easily accessed by shallow-rooted plants. For reasons that are unclear, plants grown in the presence of stinging nettle display exceptional vigor and resist spoiling.

The best way to see how companions interact with each other is first to follow the given guidelines. Secondly, keep careful records of your successes and failures. Learn the basic combinations and then experiment with your own. No two gardens are alike.

Good luck, have fun, and happy gardening!

Some planting suggestions for a vegetable companion garden:

Asparagus – likes parsley, tomatoes, basil, carrots, dill, marigolds, nasturtiums. **Dislikes** onion, garlic, potato. **Benefit:** Pot marigolds, parsley, tomatoes deter beetles.

Basil – likes pepper, tomato, marigold. **Benefit:** Improves the flavor and growth of garden crops, especially tomatoes and lettuce. Repels mosquitoes.

Beans – plant near corn, cucs, potatoes, cabbage, beets, carrots, cauliflower, peas, celeriac, celery, marigolds, strawberries, summer savory. **Dislikes** garlic, onions, chives, leeks, shallots, tomatoes, gladiolus, fennel, peppers.

Beets – likes bush beans, cabbage family, lettuce, onion, radish, garlic, sage, kohlrabi. **Dislikes** pole and runner beans.

Broccoli & Brussels Sprouts – likes beets, bush beans, carrots, cucs, dill, onions, garlic, marigolds, calendula, rosemary, sage, thyme, nasturtiums, lettuce. **Dislikes** peppers, tomatoes, oregano, grapes, strawberries. **Benefit:** Marigolds repel cabbage moths. Nasturtiums repel aphids.

Cabbage & Cauliflower – likes broccoli, brussels sprouts, beets, celery, chard, spinach, tomatoes, bush bean, dill, onion, rhubarb, turnip, dill, oregano, rosemary, sage. **Dislikes** pole bean, strawberry. **Benefit:** Tomatoes and celery repel cabbage worms; celery, onion, herbs keep pests away.

Carrots – like beans, brussels sprouts, cabbage, chives, lettuce, leek, onion, peas, radish, garlic, rosemary, sage, tomato, parsley. **Dislikes** celery, dill, parsnip. **Benefit:** Onions, leeks, rosemary, sage repel carrot flies.

Celery – likes leek, tomato, bush beans, cauliflower, cabbage, dill. **Dislikes** parsley, potato.

Chives – likes carrots, apples, berries, grapes, peas, roses, tomatoes. **Dislikes** peas, beans. **Benefit:** Improves flavor and growth of companions. Deters aphids.

Corn – likes potatoes, beans, peas, cucs, pumpkin, squash, melons, marigolds, sunflowers, zucchini, sunchokes, marjoram.

Cucumbers – like beans, corn, cabbage, radishes, celery, dill, lettuce, peas, sunflowers. Avoid planting around potatoes as they can encourage blight in potato crops. Cucumbers do not grow well with aromatic herbs. **Dislikes** tomato. **Benefit:** Radishes deter cucumber beetle. Thin strips of cucumber repel ants.

Dill – likes broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, cucs, lettuce, onions. **Dislikes** carrots. **Benefit:** Improves flavor and growth of cabbage family plants.

Eggplant – likes green beans, peppers, potatoes, tomatoes, marjoram. **Benefit:** Green beans deter

Colorado potato beetles.

Fruit Trees – like chives, garlic, carrots, bulbs, strawberries, nasturtiums, columbine, day lilies.

Garlic – likes tomato, cabbage, cane fruits, roses, drip line of fruit trees. **Dislikes** peas, beans.

Benefit: Deters Japanese beetles and aphids. A garlic oil spray deters onion flies, aphids, and ermine moths. A garlic tea helps repel late potato blight.

Horseradish – likes fruit trees, potatoes. Be careful, this can be an invasive plant!

Kale – likes aromatic herbs, cabbage family, marigolds, nasturtiums. **Dislikes** pole beans, strawberries.

Kohlrabi – likes cabbage, cauliflower, beets, lettuce, onion. **Dislikes** fennel, pole beans, tomatoes, strawberries. **Note:** Kohlrabi stunts tomatoes.

Lavender – likes broccoli, cabbage family.

Leeks – like onions, celery, carrots, lettuce. **Dislikes** beans, peas.

Lettuce – likes carrots, radish, beets, parsnips, cucs, beans, peas, radish, strawberries, marigolds.

Dislikes cabbage, cress, parsley. **Benefit:** Lettuce tenderizes summer radishes.

Marigolds – like all garden crops. **Benefit:** Stimulates vegetable growth and deters bean beetles, aphids, potato bugs, squash bugs, nematodes, and maggots.

Marjoram – likes all garden crops. **Benefit:** Stimulates vegetable growth.

Melons – like corn, sunflowers, morning glory.

Mint – likes cabbage, tomato. **Note:** Can be an invasive plant!

Nasturtiums – like apples, beans, cabbage family, greenhouse crops, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, squash. **Benefit:** Repels aphids, potato bugs, squash bugs, striped pumpkin beetles, and Mexican bean beetles and destroys white flies in greenhouses.

Onions – likes beets, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, strawberries, parsnip, tomatoes, marjoram, rosemary, savory, roses. **Dislikes** beans, peas. **Benefit:** Deters most pests, especially maggots.

Oregano – likes all garden crops. **Benefit:** Deters many insect pests.

Parsley – likes tomato, asparagus, roses, corn, carrots, beans, radish, rosemary. **Benefit:** Draws insects away from tomatoes.

Parsnips – like onions, radishes. **Benefit:** Onions help keep root maggots from parsnips.

Peas – likes corn, beans, carrots, celery, cucs, radishes, tomatoes, lettuce, turnips, potatoes, aromatic herbs. **Dislikes** onions, chives, garlic, shallots, leeks, gladiolus.

Peppers – love tomatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, eggplant, basil. **Dislike** potatoes, fennel, kohlrabi.

Potatoes – like beans, basil, cabbage, corn, peas, squash, eggplant, horseradish, parsnip, marigold.

Dislike cucs, apples, cherries, pumpkins, peppers, tomatoes, celery, sunflowers, apples, raspberries, strawberries. **Benefit:** Basil deters potato beetles; marigolds (dug into crop soil) deter nematodes; horseradish increases disease resistance.

Pumpkins – like corn, pole bean, radish. **Dislike** potato.

Radish – like peas, nasturtiums, chervil, lettuce, cucs, beets, spinach, carrots, cabbage, squash, melons, tomatoes, beans, corn, eggplant, marjoram. **Dislikes** potatoes. **Benefit:** Radishes deter flea and cucumber beetles. Chervil makes radishes hot. Lettuce helps make radishes tender. Nasturtiums improve radishes' flavor.

Rhubarb – likes columbines.

Rosemary – likes beans, cabbage, carrots, beans, strawberries. **Benefit:** Repels bean beetles, cabbage moths, and carrot flies.

Sage – likes rosemary, cabbage, carrots. **Dislikes** cucumber. **Benefit:** Deters cabbage moths and carrot flies. Invigorates tomato plants.

Spinach – likes celery, corn, eggplant, cauliflower, beans, lettuce, peas, strawberry.

Squash – likes corn, onion, radish, nasturtiums, fruit trees, strawberries. **Benefit:** Nasturtiums repel squash bugs.

Strawberries – like bush beans, lettuce, nasturtium, onion, radish, spinach. **Dislikes** cabbage, potatoes.

Sunflowers - like cucumbers. **Dislike** potatoes. **Benefit:** Can provide a trellis and shelter for shade-loving cucumbers.

Swiss Chard – likes bush beans, kohlrabi, onions. **Dislikes** pole beans.

Tarragon – likes all garden crops. **Benefit:** Improves vegetables' flavor and growth.

Thyme – plant near all garden crops. **Benefit:** Deters cabbage moth.

Tomatoes – like carrots, basil, onion, chives, parsley, asparagus, celery, peppers, marigold, nasturtiums, garlic. **Dislike** potatoes, fennel, cabbage, kohlrabi, dill, beets, corn, rosemary. **Benefit:** Garlic planted between tomato plants protects them from spider mites; tomatoes protect roses against blackspot.

Turnips & Rhutabagas – like peas.

Watermelon – likes potatoes mulched with straw. (Generally, melons do not like potatoes.)

Zucchini – plant near flowering herbs for pollination, like nasturtiums.

Don't forget about the bees! Attracting bees is so important for our crops to produce. One out of every three bites of food is thanks to the bees.

Bees & Butterflies Love – bee balm, purple coneflower, common lavender, black-eyed susans, cosmos, sunflowers, foxglove, allium, dandelion, thyme, cilantro, sage, fennel, hollyhock, crocus, snowdrop, gerranium, calendula, sweet alyssum, poppy, zinnia.

Great Combinations of Companion Plants:

cucumbers & nasturtiums

roses & chives

tomatoes, cabbage & dill

radishes & spinach

potatoes & sweet alyssum

basil & sweet peppers

Some reference material:

"Carrots Love Tomatoes"

"Companion Planting Basics"

"The Complete Guide to Companion Planting"

Farmer's Almanac