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- 8 Companion Planting Ideas for Your Garden

8 Companion Planting Ideas for Your Garden

Solve common gardening problems naturally by pairing up plants

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What do you get when you plant tomatoes and basil together? The tastiest tomatoes you've ever eaten.

Basil is thought to give tomatoes an extra boost of flavor because the plants share nutrients under the soil surface, while tomato plants shade tender basil leaves.

This delicious relationship is just one example of companion planting. Companion plants are vegetables, herbs, fruits, roots, and flowers grown together that help each other in the garden. Along with boosting produce flavor, companion planting can also solve common gardening challenges, such as soil quality, insect pests, attracting beneficial bugs, and growing more productive gardens.

Companion Planting Explained

One of the oldest companion planting methods recorded is called the Three Sisters, a combination of corn, beans, and squash, [according to the University of Wisconsin Extension](#). Various Native Americans communities planted these together because of the symbiotic relationship they form: Beans add nutrients to the soil, corn provides a tall trellis for bean vines to climb, and large squash leaves act as moisture-saving mulch.

There are two keys to successful companion planting:

1. Matching the right plants together
2. Planting pairs where they'll do the most good

If you're considering companion planting for your garden, here are eight tips to help you get started.

1. Enhance Soil Fertility with Legumes

Legumes add nitrogen to soil, which helps fertilize other plants. How does it work? Legumes improve soil fertility with bacteria that forms on small growths on their roots. These nodules absorb nitrogen into the soil from the atmosphere to feed the bean and pea plants while also fertilizing neighboring plants.

Consider these pairs: beans or peas and corn or squash. Try your hand at a Three Sisters planting to see how these pairs can help each other in the garden. Avoid planting beans and peas with garlic or onions.

2. Use Decoys to Fool Flying Insect Pests

Trap cropping is a planting method that uses one kind of plant to attract insect pests away from another, essentially serving as a decoy.

Consider this pair: radishes and broccoli. Flea beetles can wreak havoc on broccoli. But if radish plants are nearby, the beetles will drill small holes in the radishes' leafy foliage, leaving the more valuable vegetable alone.

3. Protect Edible Roots with Radishes

Radishes come to the rescue again to save other root vegetables. Because radishes sprout quickly, they serve as row markers for other slower crops. Plus, radish roots keep soil loose so nearby plants can sprout more easily.

Consider this pair: radishes and parsnip or carrots. Mix radish seeds with parsnip or carrot seeds, then plant.

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4. Plant for the Pollinator Buzz

Flowers are a natural fit for vegetable gardens because they attract the pollinators that plants need.

Consider this pair: tomatoes and sunflowers. Plant nectar-rich bee balm with pollen-producing sunflowers close to where the tomatoes grow. Both of these long-blooming plants attract bumblebees, honeybees, and other beneficial insects that will pollinate tomato plants and other vegetables.

5. Repel Pests with Onions and Garlic

When interspersed through the garden, onions and garlic emit a strong smell that can help repel cabbage loopers, cabbage worms, aphids, and other pests. Some gardeners plant chives, another heady herb, near roses to help prevent damage from aphids.

Consider these pairs: onions or garlic and cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, or other members of the cabbage family.

6. Maximize Garden Space

Intermingling tall and shorter plants is a simple way to make the most of a smaller space.

Consider this pair: pole beans with lettuce. Pole beans grow quickly and can reach 10 feet tall when supported on a trellis. Lettuce planted at the base of bean plants benefits from the foliage's cooling shade, which can extend your lettuce-growing season.

7. Use Succession Planting to Block Weeds

Weeds will take advantage of empty spaces in the garden, so stop them before they sprout. As soon as you harvest one vegetable, plant a different crop.

Consider this trio: peas, bush beans, and fall veggies. After peas are done in late spring, plant bush beans in their place. Follow the bush bean harvest with a fall crop, like leaf lettuce, spinach, or turnips.

8. Expand Your Planting Options

Gardeners can get more from their garden beds by alternating rows of crops.

Consider this pair: lettuce and cabbage. Instead of many rows of leaf lettuce, which has a short season, plant lettuce between rows of cabbage, a longer-season crop. Intercropping like this increases the harvest, and it improves the biodiversity and health of the garden.

Avoid Bad Neighbors: Planting Pairs that Do Not Work

While most plants are good companions, some don't get along. For example, pole beans planted near sunflowers won't grow well because they'll be competing for space and light. Beans and peas aren't compatible with onions and garlic because these alliums give off chemicals that can stunt the legumes' growth.

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