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Companion Planting

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Once the realm of the hard-core, hippy, home gardener, companion planting is now an incredibly popular practice - from beginner gardeners right up to large-scale agriculture. But, despite its popularity (it's huge in Europe), companion planting is often misunderstood, misused and misrepresented as the "cure-all solution" to problems in the vegetable patch.



So what is companion planting? Essentially, it's a method of growing plants together, with the idea that they will assist each other in some way, like deterring pests, improving growth, enhancing flavour, attracting beneficial insects, fixing nitrogen, disrupting "patterns" and trap cropping. But, just as we have good neighbours, there are bad neighbours as well. Some plants really dislike each other, and shouldn't be planted in close quarters, lest one of them struggle or meet its untimely demise.

Mythbusters - Does it Actually Work?

Now, the "Big Question": does it work? Well, yes and no. There is a fairly limited amount of actual scientific information on companion planting, but it is safe to say that some combinations do seem to work, while others can be a bit hit and miss. Why? Well, for starters, companion planting is a northern hemisphere concept that works a treat up there, but not as well down here in Australia.

Secondly, it doesn't work so well because it isn't understood. We've all heard that basil and tomatoes should be planted together, but why? How many of each is required? Is one basil per tomato enough? Who benefits? What are we deterring? Does it enhance flavour? For years, I planted one basil plant next to each of my tomatoes, and guess what? Nothing happened. There was no discernable difference in taste. Nothing seemed to be encouraged or deterred. Nothing grew better or worse than it had before, there was simply no advantage, other than me not having to walk so far to make a pasta sauce!

Do you know why? Because, for basil to successfully repel flies from tomatoes, an absolute shovel-load of basil is required in your patch. I'm talking several basil plants for each tomato, and even then it won't repel fruit fly. I love basil as much as the next gardener, but I don't love it that much, and, to be honest, I've never had an issue with flies on my tomatoes. But who knew this? And how many of us think that this is the quick fix for all our garden woes?

Get Your Fix - Companions that Work!

Well, companion planting CAN be the quick fix, and here's how: biodiversity! The best thing about companion planting is that it increases the biodiversity of your patch; that is, the variety of life forms in your garden. Some of the greatest companion plants in my garden are those which have nothing to do with my vegetable patch, but are the awesome locally native trees and shrubs I have planted about the place. Clever planning (if I do say so myself) has meant that my garden is never without blossom, and is therefore never without the array of critters that come with that: birds, pollinating insects (like butterflies, bees, and native wasps), reptiles, beetles and all sorts of helpful garden buddies.

By encouraging this assortment of good guys, my garden is almost completely without the bad guys, who never get a foothold in numbers that matter to me anyway! Remember, a lettuce leaf with a hole in it doesn't require chemical warfare, nor does it signal an attack of the dreaded munchies! So now that I've put you off companion planting all together, let me say that I reckon there are some combinations that really work, especially those that involve plants that have a fair odour to them. Also, there are definitely combinations that dislike each other, so I've made for you, dear readers, what is possibly the most comprehensive companion planting chart in the known universe.

Sustainable Gardening Australia presents:

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Apple	Nasturtium, Chives	Nasturtium climbs tree and is said to repel codling moth	Potatoes
Apricot	Basil, Tansy, Asparagus	Basil and tansy are said to repel damaging insects	
Asparagus	Apricot, Basil, Chives, Comfrey, Lovage, Marjoram, Parsley, Tomatoes	Basil and Parsley are said to improve flavour. Onions and garlic release substances reducing growth.	Garlic, Onions
Balm (Lemon)	Tomatoes	Attracts bees, said to enhance flavour and growth	
Basil	Tomatoes	Basil said to repel flies and mosquitoes	
Beans (climbing)	Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Corn, Lettuce, Lovage, Majoram, Parsley		Beetroot, Chives, Garlic, Gladiolus, Onions, Sunflower
Beetroot	Beans (bush), Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Kohl Rabi, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Onion, Peas, Potato, Spinach, Silverbeet	Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Beans (Climbing), Tomato

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Borage	Squash, Strawberries, Tomato	Said to deter tomato worm and improve tomato flavour and yield. Said to increase strawberry yield.	
Brassicas (Incl: Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower)	Beans, Beetroot, Carrots, Chamomile, Coriander, Cucumber, Dill, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Marigold (French), Mint, Nasturtium, Pea, Potato, Rosemary, Sage, Tansy, Thyme, Zinnias	Dill attracts a Cabbage White Butterfly controlling wasp. Nasturtium disguises and repels aphids. Sage repels the Cabbage White Butterfly. Zinnias attract ladybirds, which we love! Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Garlic, Rue, Strawberry, Tomato
Capsicum, Chilli	Carrots, Onions, Tomato		
Carrots	Beans, Chives, Coriander, Cucumber, Leeks, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Onion, Pea, Radish, Rosemary, Sage, Tomato	Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Dill, Celery
Celery	Cabbage, Chives, Dill, Dwarf Beans, Leek, Lovage, Majoram, Onion, Pea, Sage, Spinach, Tomato	Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Carrots, Parsnip, Potato

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Chamomile	Cabbage, Onion	Deters flies and mosquitoes. Strengthens neighbouring plants	
Chives	Apples, Cucumbers, Lettuce, Peas	Prevents Apple Scab. Said to deter aphids	Beans
Cucumber	Basil, Beans, Borage, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Corn, Dill Kohl Rabi, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Nasturtium, Parsnip, Pea, Radish, Sunflower, Tansy	Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Potato, Sage, Strongly Aromatic Herbs
Dill	Brassicas (Incl: Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower)	Dill attracts a Cabbage White Butterfly controlling wasp	
Eggplant	Beans, Spinach		
Garlic	Apricot, Cherry, Mulberry, Parsnip, Peach, Pear, Raspberry, Rosemary, Rose	Deters aphids, especially from roses and raspberry. Repels Cabbage White Butterfly	Beans, Cabbage, Peas, Strawberry
Kohl Rabi	Beetroot, Onion		Beans, Tomato
Leek	Carrot, Celery, Lovage, Majoram, Onion, Parsnip, Strawberry		Beans, Peas, Parsley

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Lettuce	Achillea, Beans, Beetroot, Cabbage, Carrot, Chervil, Coreopsis, Cucumber, Lovage, Marjoram, Marigold (French), Onion, Parsnip, Pea, Radish, Strawberry, Zinnia	Achillea, Coreopsis & Zinnia attract pollinators and offer shade for lettuce	Parsley
Marigolds (French)	Numerous vegetables, including tomato	Kills root knot nematodes and eel worm	
Melon	Radish, Sweet Corn		
Mint	Cabbage, Tomato	Deters pests such as Cabbage White Butterfly, ants and fleas	
Nasturtium	Cabbages, Fruit Trees, Radishes, Zucchini	Flowers repel aphids and codling moth. Cabbage white butterfly is attracted to this plant, and will seek it out over cabbages	
Onion	Beetroot, Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrot, Chamomile, Leeks, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Parsley, Parsnip, Silverbeet, Strawberry, Summer Savory, Tomato	Smell of onion said to deter numerous pests. Onions release substances reducing growth of Bad Neighbours	Asparagus, Beans, Gladioli, Peas

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Parsley	Asparagus, Sweet Corn, Tomato	Said to improve flavour of asparagus and tomato	
Peas	Beans, Beetroot, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celery, Cucumber, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Parsnip, Potato, Radish, Sage, Squash, Sweet Corn	Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth. Sweet Corn has traditionally been used as "living stakes" for peas	Chives, Garlic, Onion, Shallots
Potato	Beans, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Corn, Eggplant, Horseradish, Lovage, Marjoram, Marigold (French), Nasturtium, Parsnip, Peas, Sweet Alyssum, Sweet Corn, Watermelon	Sweet Alyssum and Marigolds attract beneficials and suppress weedsPotatoes release substances reducing growth of Bad Neighbours. Horseradish should be planted at the corners of the patch	Apple, Celery, Cherry, Cucumber, Pumpkin, Raspberry, Rosemary, Squash, Sunflower, Tomato
Pumpkin	Beans, Cabbage, Eggplant, Peas, Radish, Sweet Corn	Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Potato
Radish	Beans, Carrot, Chervil, Cucumber, Sweet Corn, Cucumber, Lettuce, Lovage, Marjoram, Nasturtium, Parsnip, Pea, Spinach, Sweet Corn	Radish is said to attract leaf miners from Spinach	Hyssop

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Raspberry			Blackberries, Potato, Tomato
Rosemary	Beans, Cabbage, Carrot, Sage	Said to deter Cabbage white butterfly. Attracts beneficial insects	
Sage	Brassicas (Incl: Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower), Carrot, Rosemary	Sage repels the Cabbage White Butterfly	Cucumber
Silverbeet	Beetroot, Cherry, Lavender, Lovage, Marjoram, Onion		Basil, Wormwood
Spinach	Celery, Eggplant, Strawberries		
Squash	Borage, Lovage, Marjoram, Nasturtium, Peas, Sunflower, Sweet Corn, Tansy		Potato
Strawberry	Beans, Borage, Chives, Leek, Lettuce, Marigold, Onion, Pyrethrum, Sage, Spinach		Brassicas (Incl: Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower), Brussel Sprouts, Garlic
Sunflower	Apricots, Cucumbers, Squash		Beans, Potato

Plant	Good Neighbours	How it works	Bad Neighbours
Sweet Corn	Beans, Cucumbers, Lovage, Marjoram, Melon, Parsnip, Peas, Potato, Pumpkin, Radish, Squash, Zucchini	Sweet Corn has traditionally been used as "living stakes" for peas. Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Cabbage
Tomato	Asparagus, Basil, Celery, Borage, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celery, Chives, Dill, Gooseberry, Grape, Hyssop, Lovage, Mariglod (French), Marjoram, Mint, Nasturtium, Onion, Parsley, Parsnip, Turnip	Marigolds said to repel white fly and root knot nematode. Bad Neighbours roots release substances reducing growth	Apricots, Beetroot, Cabbage, Fennel, Kohl Rabi, Potato, Rosemary, Sweet Corn
Turnip	Cucumbers, Lettuce, Nasturtium, Peas, Tomato		
Watermelon	Potato		
Yarrow	Most aromatic herbs	When planted along pathways, is said to enhance essential oil production and herb flavour.	
Zucchini	Lovage, Marjoram, Nasturtium, Sweet Corn		

and...

a couple of general plants that make great companions for other reasons

- **Basil** helps repel flies and mosquitoes.
- **Borage** in the strawberry patch will increase the yield.
- **Catnip** repels fleas, ants and rodents.
- **Caraway** helps breakdown heavy soils.
- **Chamomile** deters flies and mosquitoes and gives strength to any plant growing nearby.
- **Chives** grown beneath apple trees will help to prevent apple scab; beneath roses will keep away aphids and blackspot.
- **Elderberry** a general insecticide, the leaves encourage compost fermentation, the flowers and berries make lovely wine!
- **Fennel** (not *F. vulgare* or *F. officinale*) repels flies, fleas and ants.
- **French Marigold** root secretions kill nematodes in the soil. Will repel white fly amongst tomatoes.
- **Garlic** helps keep aphids away from roses.
- **Hyssop** attracts cabbage white moth keeping brassicas free from infestation.
- **Mint** repels cabbage white moth. Dried and placed with clothes will repel clothes moth.
- **Nasturtium** secrete a mustard oil, which many insects find attractive and will seek out, particularly the cabbage white moth. Alternatively, the flowers repel aphids and the cucumber beetle. The climbing variety grown up apple trees will repel codling moth.
- **Pyrethrum** will repel bugs if grown around the vegetable garden.
- **Rosemary** repels carrot fly.
- **Rue** (*Rutus*, not *Peganum*) keeps cats and dogs off garden beds if planted round the borders.
- **Sage** protects cabbages from cabbage white moth.
- **Tansy** (*Tanacetum*, not *Senecio*) repels moths, flies and ants. Plant beneath peach trees to repel harmful flying insects. Tansy leaves assist compost fermentation.
- **Wormwood** (*Artemesia*, not *Ambrosia*) although it can inhibit the growth of plants near it, wormwood does repel moths, flies and fleas and keeps animals off the garden.