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Companion Planting

Plants, like people, influence one another. Some get along better together than others. Black walnut and butternut have an antagonistic relationship with tomatoes, for example. The toxin juglans exuded from the trees' roots is quite toxic to several plants, including those of the nightshade family such as tomato, pepper, and eggplant. Plant neighbor relationships might take several forms. First, they may improve the health or flavor of a companion. Second, they may interfere with the growth of a neighbor. Third, they may repel or trap an undesirable critter. Companion plant may also attract a beneficial insect.

Although there are several references about beneficial relationships between plants, the science of companion planting is often anecdotal. There appears to be no research proven reproducible companion planting recommendations. There are numerous suggestions rooted in organic agriculture. The suggestions below are a starting point for individual trials. Localized growing environment influence success or failure. Certainly, a mixed plant community rather than a monoculture is a model for companion planting. The array of colors, aromas and ripening times often confuse plant pests in these situations. The following are a few plants that seem to help one another. The garden should test and trial. Continue doing what works and abandon what does not.

Asparagus – A good method for planting is in a long row at one side of the garden. After harvest, plant tomatoes on either side, and both plants reap benefits from each other. Parsley planted with asparagus seems to provide vigor to both.

Beans – Generally, beans thrive when interplanted with carrots, cauliflower and beets. They also aid cucumbers and cabbage. A Summer Savory companion improves growth and flavor as well as repelling bean beetles. As a bonus, cook both together for a great flavor. Beans don't like members of the onion family and they dislike being planted near gladiolas.

Beets – Beets grow well near bush beans, onions, and kohlrabi, but dislike *pole* beans. In addition, lettuce and brassicas are good companions.

Cabbage – Cole crops such as cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts as well as collards, rutabagas and turnips. They do well when planted with aromatic plants such as dill, celery, chamomile, sage, peppermint, and rosemary. Do not plant with tomatoes, pole beans or strawberries.

Carrots – Onions, leeks and herbs such as rosemary, wormwood, and sage act as repellents to the carrot fly.

Corn – Sweet corn does well with potatoes, peas, beans, cucumbers, pumpkin, and squash. Melons, squash, pumpkin and cukes like the shade provided by corn.

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Cucumbers – Cukes seem to be offensive to raccoons, so it's good to plant them near your corn. Thin strips of cucumbers also repel ants. Sow 2 or 3 radish seeds in cucumber hills to repel cucumber beetles. Don't pull the radishes even if they go to seed. Cukes and potatoes are antagonistic. Cukes do not grow well with aromatic herbs.

Lettuce – Lettuce grows well with strawberries, cucumbers and carrots. Radishes grown with lettuce are especially good.

Onion – Onions and all members of the cabbage family get along well together. They also like beets, strawberries, tomatoes, lettuce, summer savory and a sparse planting of chamomile. They do not like peas and beans. Ornamental relatives of the onion are helpful as protective companions for roses. Since onion maggots travel from plant to plant when set in a row, scatter your onion plants throughout the garden.

Sweet Pepper – Basil and sweet peppers have similar general requirements. They work well when planted together.

Squash – As with cucumbers, 2 or 3 icicle radishes planted in each hill help prevent insects on squash. Again, let them grow and go to seed. Nasturtiums repel squash bugs. Also, squash planted either earlier or later than usual will often remain insect free.

Tomato – Tomatoes and all Cole crops should be kept apart. Tomatoes also dislike potatoes and fennel. Tomatoes are compatible with chives, onion, parsley, marigold, nasturtium and carrot. Garlic planted between tomato plants protects them from red spider mites. Tomatoes protect roses against blackspot. **A spray for roses:** make a solution of tomato leaves in your blender by adding 4 or 5 parts of water and 1 tablespoon of cornstarch. Strain and spray on roses where it is not convenient to plant tomatoes as companions.

The best way to see how companions interact with each other is first follow the given guidelines. Secondly, and most importantly, keep careful records of your successes and failures. Learn the basic combinations and then experiment with your own. Just as every person is different, no two gardens are alike. That is why personal observation is so important.

Resources: *Carrots Love Tomatoes*, by Louise Riotte; several books from Rodale Press.