

**COMPANION PLANTING 3**

Here we are again, for the third article running, closely focusing on the fascinating subject of companion planting. It's likely a few more articles yet will be used to cover other aspects of this subject. But it is so simple, and potentially 'CHEAP', that it's something that should appeal to most gardeners.



This time we will look at:

**Some Plants Help Others Directly.**

The most obvious way one can see this happening is by plants protecting others from the worst winds and the strongest sun.

Most people have heard of *Windbreaks*, which is a brilliant way of deflecting wind direction. With larger plants located in strategic positions, the results can be very effective. You'll be amazed how much extra heat you can keep in a garden, which isn't dominated by wind. You will also notice that moisture evaporation is significantly reduced when excessive winds are absent. Keeping areas protected against wind will also provide better habitat for pollinators and predators. You can even increase how long they are active, because if sheltered, they will emerge in the spring much earlier. So obviously they will have a head start with helping the overall health of your plants.

Don't go over board with shelter though. Having the air too still is just as unhealthy, and you may make things too dark of you have too much vegetation. Even worse, you may even cause your garden to become a frost pocket if it is too sheltered in winter.

Shade loving plants, together with freshly transplanted plants and seedlings, not only need sheltering from the wind, but from the intense sun too, so as to protect them from drying out. Most plants like lots of sun, but if you do have something sun sensitive, you should endeavour to grow something taller next to it which will provide the required shade.

Plants like Clematis need their branches to be in full sun, yet need moist and shady roots. By using dense and leafy groundcover plants around their roots will provide the perfect conditions, as long as the above ground growth is in full sun.

Sweet corn or sunflowers not only provide protection from the sun and wind, they provide natural supports for melons and peas. Robust trees and shrubs can also provide a framework for climbers like roses, wisteria and passionflowers. But if the climber is too dominant, they may over run their host plant.

*Crop rotation* is also a well-known aspect of companion planting too. During a plants life, it sets down huge volumes of roots. When it dies or has been removed, the roots rot away leaving small tunnels underground, often filled with nutrients. Some plants love and are well suited to access these second-hand nutrients, and have a better ability to avoid diseases than the same plants planted in the same place do. This is the fundamental concept of crop rotation.

Most plants constantly put nutrients back into the soil via their root secretions. Plants such as legumes (beans etc) are well known for doing this, as they leave nitrogen behind in the soil via the nodules on their roots. This is ideal for growing Brassica (cabbages etc) as a following crop, because nitrogen promotes healthy leaf growth.

Plants like Barley excrete potassium as they mature and the unwanted nutrients are forced into the leaves, which are

dropped at the point of ripening.

But keep in mind that most plants are in direct competition with one another, so some excretions can deter other plants and pests too. So keep an eye on your crop rotation, because if you get it right it will work wonders. Get it wrong and you could face a crop failure.

A good 3-year rotational cycle is adequate for most healthy land. With root crops grown in year 1, followed by legumes and the Brassica in years 2 and 3 respectively.

Above all, the best companion any garden can have is a good, caring and observant gardener. Just like you!

*Good gardening – STUART MABBUTT*

For a one off maintenance visit to remove the shroud of winter from your garden so you can enjoy the emerging spring flowers and bulbs. Phone Stuart on 01865 747243.

**Do you live in Oxfordshire? Ready to do something about youth crime?**

Want to help Victims have their say?

You'd sit on a panel with other volunteers and a professional from the Youth Offending Team and help make decisions with young offenders, their families and victims, by drawing up solutions to reduce the risk of further offending and make good the harm they've done.

**A Panel Member's Story**

The phone rings, it's the Youth Offending Team (YOT) Can you chair a panel at 5pm next Monday? It's a fifteen-year-old youth called Nigel who has been given a six-month Referral Order for criminal damage. He kicked over a neighbour's fence. The victim is Mrs Smith and she is planning to attend the panel meeting.

The panel is held in a small room in a local community centre. A circle of chairs is arranged around a coffee table. The young offender, his mother, the victim, two volunteer panel members and a member of the Youth Offending Team will attend the panel. Gradually people arrive.

Initially, there is an uneasy atmosphere, so the first task of the volunteers is to put everyone at their ease by explaining the procedure and reassuring everyone, especially the young offender and victim, that they will all have an opportunity to have their say.

Gradually the tension drops and the panel discusses what Nigel can do to put right some of the harm he has caused and what can be done to prevent further offending.

By the end of the meeting, a contract has been agreed with Nigel to mend the damaged fence overseen by a reparation supervisor. He will also attend a series of meetings with his YOT Officer to address his offending behaviour plus an anger management course. Hopefully, this will be Nigel's first and last tangle with the law and Mrs Smith feels that her needs have been addressed.

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So, what do you need to do to become a panel member? You will need to attend a 7-day training course; refreshments and lunch are provided. You will need to be able to offer 4 or 5 hours a month to attend the panels. You need to have good 'people' skills. You must be over 18 years, there is no upper age limit and ideally, volunteers will represent all sections of the community.

Am I glad I got involved? Yes. Is it enjoyable? Well it can be but it is very rewarding. If this sounds interesting to you, then please call Gilly Workman 01865 202218 for an informal chat or an application pack; alternatively email: gilly.workman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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