

GARDENING IS EASY

Gardening is easy, as long as you work with, and not against nature. Having now fully relocated to Derbyshire, this pearl of wisdom has firmly been brought home to me, as there is no way I will be able to garden here in the same way as I do in Oxford. I will certainly need to adapt my techniques so I am not fighting a losing battle against the Peak District's weather conditions. Having just read an article in the 'Farmers Guardian', which claims numbers of slugs are increasing. Further claiming, "soil sampling is revealing slug numbers up to 150 per 2 square metres", it's clear with all the chemicals and slug pellets we use, nature's still winning the battle. This brings me back to working with nature, not against it, which leads on to Companion Planting. I will cover the rudiments in this article, and expand the subject next time.



I have touched on the subject of companion planting before, but it's worth covering again, so you can digest the principles in time for next years growing season. Companion planting operates on a number of differing levels, yet most of us think its just a matter of planting marigolds near our lettuces in the hope a few insects will be kept away. Well, this is just the tip of the iceberg! (Pardon the pun). There are a number of principles, which can be broken down as follows:

- 1 Plants can prevent fungus and other diseases in neighbouring plants.
- 2 Plants can attract predators, which prey on pests found on other plants.
- 3 Plants may be generally beneficial.
- 4 Some plants help others by sheltering them from the weather conditions, and can sometimes even release chemicals from their roots, which help other plants.
- 5 Plants not only attract predators, but also pollinators, which can help other plants. The plants themselves can even help keep some pests away.
- 6 Some plants actively improve the soil, especially those considered to be humus/texture improvers and mineral builders.
- 7 Other plants can even compete with, or can even directly harm others, which helps weed control.
- 8 Specific plants can even be used as camouflage or distraction plants to keep pests away from you treasured plants.
- 9 There are even plants that help other plants if they are present in very small numbers, but if the line is crossed and you have to many of them, they can become harmful and too dominant.

I only have space to cover point 1 here, but we'll explore the other principles in the future.

Plants that help prevent fungus and disease.

Fungus often live on rotting material, but some fungus can just as easily live off living plants too. Chemicals released from the roots of nearby plants could be your first line of defence. Silica rich plants are good plants to use, as is a garlic spray poured on to the problem area, which I detailed how to make in a previous article. Nettles too have been shown to help fight certain types of these underground fungal invaders. Green manures, such as Flax, release a cyanide gas, which kill some fungus, leaving the beneficial fungus unharmed. Mustard used as a green manure, also helps fight well established club root disease on land where cabbages are to be grown, but good crop rotation is the best way to avoid this disease. Little is really known though about the subject of how certain plants fight disease and fungus on others. But it's a good rule of thumb to assume that anything that increases the health of other plants nearby is also going to fight against disease to an extent.

There are large gaps in our understanding of the companion planting process, but it's an exciting concept that will be explored further next time.

Good Gardening. **STUART MABBUTT**

PLAYING AWAY

We were treated to torture by a thousand laughs with the Marcham Players' Revue "Playing Away" last month. In the appropriate setting of All Saints' Alan Bennet (Tim Owen in disguise) gave us his sermon on Hairy Men, railway porters and sardines, while Eddie Shirras (not so much a disguise more a way of life) sang about his Transport of Delight in the shape of a diesel-engined, 97 horse-power omnibus! Other wonderful readings and sketches were presented to us; hankies were needed by more than one of the audience, crying for the Cremation of Sam McGee, and in another way, Joyce Grenfell's raffled rabbit, beautifully delivered by Janet Frere. After a glass of wine at half time we were suitably relaxed to join in the musical plea for a new home – see below. It is always unfair to single out particular players so our thanks go to *all* the cast and crew for a terrific evening.

ML

DO YOU HEAR THE PLAYERS SING?

Chorus

Do you hear the Players sing?
Singing the song of stage-less men?
It is the music of some actors
Who just want a stage again!
When the banging of your heart
Echoes the banging of the nails
There's a new hall about to start
When tomorrow comes!



Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand by me?
Beyond the outline plans
There is a stage we long to see
Then join in the fight
That will give us a hall with a stage.

Chorus

Will you give all you can give
So that our new stage may be built?
Some will fail and some will leave
Will you stand up and never wilt?
The sweat of the Players
Will water the meadows and Green.

Chorus

(With apologies to the lyricist of Les Miserables!)

THE MARCHAM PLAYERS

are busy making plans for next year. We are proposing to put on a production in the autumn, leaving us plenty of time to choose an appropriate play, con lots of people into taking part, find somewhere to perform, start rehearsals, and last but not least, have time to learn our lines! To this end, we are proposing to hold several play readings in The Board Room at Manor Farm, so that we can try out different plays and gauge reaction.

The first two dates are **Friday 14 January** and **Friday 18 February**, both starting at 7.30pm. Do come and join us (no obligation!). We have a very enjoyable evening, helped along by the odd glass of wine. If you would like any further information, please ring Joey Maclean (01865 391242)

FRENCH PENFRIENDS

Yolen and Remy are 14-year-old boys who live in the south of France. Both would like an English penfriend with the possibility of a holiday exchange later. For more information and their addresses contact the Creasys, 14 Mill Rd, Tel: 391398

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