

COMPANION PLANTING

New ideas often take a long time to be accepted, certainly its true in gardening. I certainly seem to have surprised a few readers by opening my last article with the statement "Gardening is easy, as long as you work with, and not against nature". As you'll remember, I was talking about companion planting when I wrote this.



The companion planting concept is by no means a new one, so obviously the thought that gardening is easy has surprised some people. I will continue to cover the basic main principles as I see them. I can expand on them in future articles if readers have a specific interest. But the following is a good further insight into this vast subject.

Plants can attract predators, which prey on pests found on other plants

To strive to produce a large and diverse selection of flowers, predators and shelter over the entire season will help ensure your gardens health and productivity. A little of everything is the answer, large plantings of similar plants is not so effective.

Increasing insect populations is a great way of expanding the food chain in your garden. A by-product being that a wider selection of wildlife will increasingly be attracted by this interesting and appetising mixture. After all, if you look after your insects, your garden can and will look after itself, and you.

Good plants to grow to increase beneficial insects are Alpine Strawberries, Buckwheat, and *Limnathes douglasii*. The latter is especially good for growing under soft fruit bushes such as red currants and gooseberries, helping keep them free from pests.

Remember too that bees and hover flies love large flat flowers, which are bluish in colour. Butterflies and moths prefer scented plants, and the colour seems less significant. But if they have a preference, I would guess that it is red and orange colours. They also seem to be attracted by flowers that are a deep tubular shape.

Plants may be generally beneficial

If you can create a habitat that forms a thick, dense shelter, you may attract a family of hedgehogs. If you can include an extra area of cool and wet shade, you may be lucky enough to attract a slow worm or some toads and newts. All these little creatures are prone to prey on some of the useful predators in your garden, but they will also consume huge volumes of less desirable pests.

Birds are also perfect to attract although they can cause damage, they also help control insects, slugs and other pests. By giving food and shelter will be all you will need to attract these colourful friends. By having a wide selection of berrying plants in winter and food for seedeaters, is a good place to start. But don't forget the ground feeding birds especially in summer, as these birds can at times eat vast quantities of pests too.

A lot of books and magazines are full of recommendations, and simple changes that can be made to improve the value of gardens for wildlife. The origins of many claims are unsubstantiated, and its unclear as to how successful these techniques really are. Little systematic scientific and replicated research has been conducted, so some claims are a little suspect.

But the two point covered here are certainly useful tools to use, and are defiantly successful if you get the balance right. A little of everything and a wide selection of plants is certainly the way forward. More companion planting next time.

Happy gardening.

STUART MABBUTT

ROOT & BRANCH

A new therapeutic gardening and craft project for people with mental health difficulties, Root & Branch is a therapeutic horticulture project for people with mental health difficulties, based on an organic farm in Watchfield. Staff, volunteers and gardeners work together on a range of gardening and craft related activities. The project aims to enable people to develop self-esteem and confidence, and improve mental health, in a non-pressurised environment. We regularly host public events including a Storytelling evening on 3rd February and a 'Wildlife Day' on 10th April 2005. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, we need volunteers to help with activities e.g. administration, publicity, gardening, fund-raising and events. For more information, please contact Liz Clarke on 01793 780380.

ANSWERS TO THE DECEMBER CROSSWORD

ACROSS: 4 Grapes 7 Macaroni 8 Leg 9 Toe 9 13 Ewe 14 Jane Barson 17 Resolution 18 Roe 20 Coldest 22 Don 23 Too 24 Revolver 25 Radley

DOWN: 1 Empty 2 Acre 3 Eros 4 Gingernuts 5 Pollen 6 Segment 11 Embroidery 12 Once 15 Omit 16 Curator 17 Record 19 Angry 21 Trot 22 Dove

TRANSPORT EXHIBITION



Halcrow has been commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to investigate the transport issues in the villages surrounding Abingdon. The villages in this study include:

- Shippon
- Sunningwell
- Dry Sandford
- Marcham
- Radley
- Wootton
- Cothill
- Gozzards Ford

This study is set within the overall context of the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy (AbITS) which was originally commissioned in March 1997.

The outcome of this study will be to establish a short, medium and long-term programme of measures to be funded and implemented in the study area for each of the villages. Our aim is to complete the study in March 2005.

We now ask for your views and ideas as local residents, on the possible options to address your local transport issues. Please come along to one of these exhibitions:

Community Centre, Wootton
Tue 8 Feb 2-7.30pm

Radley Village Hall
Wed 9 Feb 1-9pm

Sunningwell Village Hall
Fri 11 Feb 3-9pm

For further information, contact Alex Coley on 01865 810409 or Alex.Coley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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