

COMPANION PLANTING

With this fourth article, focusing on companion planting, I hope the lid has been lifted on how simple gardening can be.

You don't need "Greenfingers" or "The Magic Touch" to be successful at gardening. You just need commitment, hard work and an expanding knowledge of the subject.



Another basic principle of companion planting is: Some plants help other plants when present in small numbers, but are harmful if too numerous in number. Getting the balance right with this principle is essential. It has been noted that a Wheat crop is improved if under planted with Corncockles or even Chamomile.

Stinging nettles are also good companion plants, but not particularly nice. Obviously, if your nettle patch is too large it will become dominant, but kept under control they can assist fruit to ripen. This is especially noticeable when they are near tomatoes, with less rotting off happening with the ripening fruit. It has also been shown that oil within many herbs is increased when they are located near to a nettle colony.

If you like to grow squashes, sweetcorn or pumpkins, try growing a small crop of lettuce, beetroot or radish around them. You will find slugs and snails will attack the lettuces etc, leaving your prize squashes, sweetcorn or pumpkins to thrive.

Some plants can be used as camouflage or distraction plants to keep pests away from your treasured plants. Plants with strong odours or colours planted next to some plants prone to pest attack will help confuse the insect predators and limit their damage.

If you grow tomatoes near to beans the numbers of Leafhopper insects will be reduced. French beans planted near cabbages help keep aphid and caterpillar attacks down. Garlic planted near potatoes reduce aphid and moth attacks. Marigolds planted near crops prone to Whitefly attack will keep this pest at bay, but will fail to have any real effect if an infestation is already occurring.

Onions and carrots grown together will help keep each other's Root Flies under control. Nasturtiums can keep some aphids away from apple trees if you allow them to grow up them.

To distract Whitefly away from your crops in the greenhouse, try growing a few pots of tobacco plants in there too. When the tobacco plants are smothered in Whitefly, they can be removed and burnt, thus removing instantly the majority of this pest.

Finally, try sowing some extra sacrificial spinach seeds which the slugs and snails will devour, giving your other plants time to develop before these slimy little monsters find them too.

Good gardening.

STUART MABBUTT

LOOKING OVER THE FENCE...

...are areas outside BBOWT nature reserves suitable for Southern Damselflies and Water Voles?

Many of you will be aware that both species are present on BBOWT nature reserves in the Cothill area. Both species have national importance (the water vole is Britain's fastest declining mammal) and the southern damselfly is classed as scarce in Britain yet we hold approximately 25% of the world's population. It is protected under European law.

The next nearest population of southern damselflies is in the New Forest so those at Dry Sandford Pit are isolated from other colonies by some considerable distance. BBOWT, with lots of help from local volunteers, have been managing Dry Sandford Pit and Parsonage Moor in ways to make the habitat more suitable. They require shallow, fast flowing, June 2005



chalky water with foals water cress, water cress or water mint in the water.

Water voles were once very common, but since American mink were released into the countryside populations of water voles soon declined as the mink ate its way up river systems. Water vole colonies can be very small so it is easy for a mink to destroy a colony very quickly. Cothill is one of only 13 areas identified as having significant populations in Oxfordshire.

Most species can survive a catastrophe to a local population if there are more of the species near by and habitat conditions are right for them to be able to re-colonise. The future of both water voles and southern damselflies in the Cothill area would be much safer if we could establish colonies on as many sites as possible and make the areas between the fen sites more hospitable.

To do this we need to assess what's out there. We want to look at the area from Barrow Farm Fen in the south all the way up to the area just north of Lashford Lane Fen following the Sandford Brook. The survey will look for the presence of water voles (and mink) and look at the habitat and compare it with the requirements of the southern damselfly. Water voles will certainly use the brook and any areas of reed/fen. The damselflies were seen last year using the brook within Lashford Lane Fen so it possible that there are potentially more suitable areas (or even colonies). Once we know what the habitat is like it may be possible to manage it to make it more suitable.

We hope to carry out the surveys during late May or early June, but this is obviously dependant on getting permission of the people who own the land. If you own part of the area we are talking about or know the people who do we would be delighted if you would contact us at the BBOWT office. Please contact Cath Shellswell on 01865 775476. We will of course feed back any information we collect.

Thank you for any help you may be able to offer!!

MARCHAM GARDENING CLUB

Please contact Malcom Skinner for details of the club's meetings **07765 387275** which take place in Marcham Baptist Hall. Anyone is welcome to meet with us and there's no charge. **MALCOLM SKINNER**

BIRDWATCH

Sadly, the injured heron seen walking down Anson Close covered in blood did not survive. Local residents cared for the bird until an RSPCA Inspector took it to St Tiggywinkles Animal Hospital in Bucks. It died the following day; the cause of the injury to its fractured wing could not be confirmed. First impressions were that I might have been shot but collisions with power lines causing wing injuries do occur. (Swans flying into Farmoor Reservoir regularly cause electricity blips in the area). Along with other wild birds they are protected by the "Wildlife and Countryside Act".

Happier news is that the skylarks fill the sky with song on fine days, house martins, swift and cuckoo have been seen or heard. Colourful goldfinches flit and twitter excitedly in treetops and a great spotted woodpecker was ferreting through cherry blossom on a young tree only 8' from a neighbour's front door. Pharaoh the pheasant continues to entertain us noisily.

GG For more information about birds try www.rspb.org.uk

LOTS OF SPARE LEISURE TIME?

Retired, or thinking of retiring in a few years time, then think Bowls! What a way to enjoy yourselves in a good social atmosphere. Come and have a free go at Abingdon Bowls Club in Albert Park on Friday Evening 17th June 6-7.30pm or Saturday 19th June 2.30-7pm. You are all welcome to attend our "Open Sessions". All equipment will be provided for your use. Looking forward to see you on the green. Any further information Ring Ray on Ab.524591 or John on Ab.520523 13