

Plant Combos You Should Grow Side-by-Side



It's part folklore, part science, but companion planting just may help your garden grow.

The concept of companion planting is to plant combinations of specific plants for their mutual benefit. "The theory behind companion planting is that certain plants may help each other take up nutrients, improve pest management or attract pollinators," says Tom Maloney, horticulture educator for Penn State Extension. "Some research, such as how to attract beneficial insects like lacewings to the garden to fight pests, has been studied, so we know it's effective."

Nasturtium + Cucumber



"For me, companion planting is about bringing pollinators and beneficial insects to your garden to improve biodiversity," says Amy Stross, blogger at TenthAcreFarm.com and author of *The Suburban Micro-Farm*. Stross grows cucumbers up a trellis, and lets the nasturtiums, which have a unique scent that seems to repel pests, grow in a colourful tumble underneath.

Melons or squash + Flowering herbs



These are all vegetables that require pollinators to produce, so invite insect visitors into your garden by planting flowering herbs such as dill, fennel and parsley near melons and squash. "You won't get any yield if you don't have pollination for these veggies," says Maloney.

Sweet alyssum + Swiss chard



Alyssum is an annual that's easy to grow from seed in between rows of vegetables. "It's a big attractor of hover flies, which are beneficial insects that control aphids," says Stross. Plant pretty Swiss chard as a border, interspersed with these delicate low-growing flowers.

Corn + Pole Beans + Squash or pumpkin



This Native American example of companion planting is often called the "Three Sisters." Corn gives the beans a place to climb. Beans convert atmospheric nitrogen to a form the plants can use. The spreading leaves of squash or pumpkin create a living mulch that reduces weeds and holds moisture.

Calendula + Broccoli



These flowers exude a sticky substance on their stems that attract aphids and traps them there, says Stross. She finds that planting it next to her brassica crops, specifically broccoli, keeps the aphids off the broccoli. Plus, it brings in beneficial ladybugs to dine on the aphids.

Lettuce + Tomatoes or aubergines



"Pairing plants with different growth habits together is referred to as 'intercropping,' and we do have some data to show it's effective," says Maloney. In this case, tomatoes and aubergines grow tall and eventually can shade cool season crops such as lettuce, which doesn't like heat. This trick may extend your lettuce season slightly.

Chamomile + Cabbage



Chamomile brings in the beneficial insects for brassicas such as cabbage. In the autumn, chop it up and toss on the bed to decompose, while leaving the roots intact to decay and enrich the soil, suggests Stross.

"Maybe there's not always a lot of scientific evidence behind some of these pairings, but just start trying and see what works," says Stross. After all, experimentation is half the fun in the garden!

Plant Combo Quiz

- 1) True or False- Different plant combinations can help each other develop better.
- 2) True or False- Smelly plants can sometimes make a great repellent to insects.
- 3) True or False- Squash or pumpkin leaves create a poor living mulch that helps reduce weeds.
- 4) True or False- Sweet alyssum is a big attractor of hover flies.
- 5) Which of the following is not a part of the "three sisters" (circle all that apply):
 - a) Corn
 - b) Sweet alyssum
 - c) Pole Beans
 - d) Cucumber
 - e) Squash
- 6) Which of the following flowers, exudes a sticky substance and attracts and traps aphids?
 - a) Rose
 - b) Chamomile
 - c) Calendula
 - d) Nasturtium

Quiz Answers

- 1) True
- 2) True
- 3) False
- 4) True
- 5) B and D
- 6) C