

Who's Your Buddy – Companion Planting

Companion planting is the practice of planting crops together for improved growing conditions and pest control. Many companion planting ideas have their basis in folklore. Still, some gardeners swear by them. Let's explore several kinds of companion planting.

There are several themes for companion planting.

- Growing crops together for shade or support. Probably the most well-known trio for companion planting are the 'Three Sisters.' This practice began with the North American Indians who planted corn, beans and squash together. The theory was that the corn would give the beans a support to grow on, the beans would fix nitrogen in the soil making it more fertile for the heavy feeder corn. The squash, with its large leaves would provide shade to suppress weeds and also hold moisture in the ground.
- Another type of companion planting is based on a chemical theory. Some plants release chemicals that repel pests. It is a scientific fact that marigold roots secrete a chemical substance that will repel or kill some species of nematodes, those nasty little creatures that attack plant roots.
- One very beneficial type of companion planting involves planting flowers and herbs that attract beneficial insects to the garden. The good bugs, or their larvae, eat the bad bugs. Ladybugs, lacewings and parasitic wasps thrive on eating those bug-a-boos that want to destroy the gardener's vegetable crop.
- Trap cropping is yet another form of companion planting. In this practice, specific plants are planted near the vegetable plant in order to entice the bug-a-boos away from the desired crop. The best example of this is planting nasturtiums alongside squash. The nasturtiums don't repel the squash bugs, the bugs just like the nasturtium flowers better and are lured away.
- Succession planting can also be considered companion planting. Succession planting involves one of four methods.
 - Seasonal replacement - planting cool weather crops and then replacing them with warm season crops after the first group matures. Example: plant early lettuces followed by tomatoes, peppers, etc.
 - Relay planting - planting the same crop but using different varieties that mature at different times. Example: plant tomatoes that are ready in 50 days alongside those that mature in 90 days.
 - Interval planting - staggering the seed sowing dates every 2-3-weeks for continued harvest.
 - Intercropping – planting crops together that harvest at different times. The early crop matures and is harvested, allowing space for the next crop to grow. Example: in the 2025 Victory Garden, the garlic was harvested just as the tomato vines expanded into its space.

Companion planting plays a very important role in the success of the vegetable garden. Following are some tried and true companions that will be utilized in the 2026 Victory Garden.

Herbs that attract beneficial insects

- Dill, parsley, fennel and wild carrot (Queen Anne's lace) attract Ladybugs. These plants are also the larvae host for the Eastern Black Swallowtail butterfly.
- Nasturtiums attract pollinators as well as beneficial insects.
- Yarrow attracts ladybugs and lacewings.

Herbs that repel unwanted garden visitors

- Chives repel Japanese beetles
- Garlic & Alliums (chives, onions, leeks) and strong-smelling herbs (oregano, basil, chives, sage...etc.) deter pests from vegetables and garden ornamentals. Strong-smelling herbs planted along the edges of a garden, create a barrier against rabbits and many rodents. Garlic also repels snails.
- Lavender repels moths, fleas, flies and mosquitos.
- Marigolds are the 'workhorse' of the garden deterring numerous pests. French marigolds actually leave a beneficial chemical in the garden soil for years after their planting.
- Nasturtiums repel hoverflies and aphids.
- Rosemary deters the cabbage moth.
- Sage deters the cabbage moth and carrot fly.
- Tarragon's strong scent deters most pests.
- Thyme deters the cabbage worm.

Companion planting can greatly reduce or even eliminate the need for chemical pest control. Please visit the 2026 Victory Garden. It will be planted with love and protected by companions!

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