



Companion Planting for Fruit Gardens

Experienced in observing nature from their hunter-gathering days, early farmers must have noticed how certain plants benefitted and supported each other when planted together. In the same way, they found some plants did not grow well in close proximity. The practice of “companion planting” developed alongside agriculture and was well entrenched by medieval times and reached its peak in the cottage gardens of the Elizabethan era (the 16th-17th century). These smaller plots of land were owned and cultivated by peasants as sources of food and medicinal herbs for their families. With no room to spare, these gardens were of necessity crowded. Knowing how to maximize productivity was important. Herbs and flowers that attracted pollinating bees and beneficial insects, repelled or discouraged harmful pests, and/or enriched the soil and promoted strong growth were planted alongside vegetable, fruit, and berry crops. Eventually this lore, passed on from one generation to the next, was collected and written down. New generations of gardeners who didn’t have the time or space to make observations on their own, carefully followed Herbals, books of folk remedies, and Farmer’s Almanacs. Much of this knowledge and practice was set aside with the inexorable march of farming towards giant agribusiness. But what is old is new again: from the back-to-the-land movement of the sixties, the permaculture communities of the seventies, and continuing into organic gardening practices of today, companion planting may still be one of our best allies to have a productive garden kept free from pesticides, insecticides, and chemical fertilizers.

Fruit Support: Where to Begin?

Vegetable gardens and annual flower beds are able to bear intensive planting practices because crops are rotated and the soil is renewed each year. Consequently, tucking in helpful companions here and there between your main plantings is a snap. This flexibility also lends itself to experimenting and finding out what works in your own micro-environment. On the other hand, fruiting plants will definitely benefit from the time spent on planning. Permanent investments such as fruit and nut trees, berry and bramble bushes, grape and strawberry vines need: careful soil preparation; proper siting and installation; attentive care as immature plants; and protection as fruiting plants. In addition, try these companions:

- Flowering plants from the *Umbelliferae* family – herbs such as dill, cilantro, fennel, parsley and leaf celery – will bring ladybugs, lacewings, parasitic wasps, and predatory flies, attracted by the nectar and staying to feed on pests such as aphids, thrips, caterpillars, and insect eggs. Members of the mint family and the onion family (chives, garlic, leeks) are also good attractants for these beneficial insects. All of these plants will attract bees and other pollinators as well.
- Other pollinator attractants are: alyssum, basil, bee balm, borage, coreopsis, cosmos, hyssop, lemon balm, marjoram, summer savory, sunflowers, thyme, zinnias. Native mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum* spp.) may be the very best!
- All-around tonic plants for the fruiting garden are: borage, chamomile, geraniums, lovage, tansy, and valerian.
- Tansy, rue, and nasturtium are mentioned most often as repellants to insect pests. Catnip and chives join nasturtium specially to fight aphids. Japanese beetles plague apple, peach, apricot plum, cherry, grape, and red raspberry: use catnip, garlic, white geraniums, rue, and tansy to repel them; datura, four o’clocks, and castor bean will kill them!

The Ancient and Anecdotal ‘Science’ of Companion Planting

The Heartland Harvest Garden at Powell Gardens in Kansas City provided inspiration for this tip sheet along with the garden’s chief horticulturist, Alan Branhagan. His selections are listed in italics. We encourage you to visit and become inspired! <https://powellgardens.org/visit/gardens/heartland-harvest-garden/>

Fruiting Plant	Companion Plant – Attributes
<i>Fragaria</i> Strawberry	<i>Borage</i> - strengthens resistance to insects and diseases and improves flavor
	Onion – helps fight disease – <i>Allium</i> family plants also deter rabbits
	Also try: beans, chrysanthemum, lettuce, marigold, pea, spinach, thyme
	Antipathies: do not place plants from the <i>Brassica</i> family near Strawberries
<i>Malus domestica</i> Apple	<i>Chives</i> – to deter Apple Scab
	Leeks – To improve growth
	Garlic, lavender, nasturtium, southernwood – to deter codling moth and wooly aphids
	Also try: <i>anise hyssop</i> , foxglove, garlic, lavender, <i>lemon balm</i> , marigold, <i>mullein</i> , nasturtium, onion, pea, <i>strawberries</i> , sweet woodruff, rose (especially <i>white rugosa</i> , <i>R. arkansana</i> , <i>R. setigera</i> , <i>Fra Dagmar Hartopp Rose</i> and <i>single/wild</i>), <i>white clover</i>
<i>Prunus armeniaca</i> Apricot	Try: <i>anise</i> , basil, <i>buckwheat</i> , <i>chives</i> , <i>dill</i> , <i>fennel</i> , <i>white clover</i>
	Antipathies: do not place plants from the <i>Brassica</i> or <i>Solanum</i> families near Apricot trees
<i>Prunus cerasus</i> Cherry	Bee plants – to help with pollination
	<i>Datura</i> , four o’clocks, castor bean – to kill Japanese beetles
	Also try: garlic, nasturtiums, onions
<i>Prunus domestica</i> Plum, <i>Prunus persica</i> Peach	<i>Chives</i> , garlic, nasturtium, onion, southernwood, tansy – to deter peach borers
	Garlic – to control plum curculio
	White clover – to attract beneficial insects
	Also try: asparagus, basil, <i>borage</i> , <i>chamomile (Roman)</i> , <i>dill</i> , garlic, <i>garlic chives</i> , grape, hyssop, <i>marigold</i> , onion, <i>perilla</i> , petunia, rue, <i>strawberry</i>
<i>Pyrus pyrifolia</i> Pear	Garlic, lavender, nasturtium, <i>mint (apple/curl/citrus/ginger)</i> , <i>pennyroyal</i> , southernwood – to fight codling moth and wooly aphids
	Also try: <i>bee balm</i> , <i>chives</i> , <i>fennel (bronze)</i> , garlic, lavender, <i>mountain mint</i> , nasturtium, onion, <i>peppermint</i> , <i>spearmint</i>
<i>Rubus</i> Raspberry/Blackberry <i>Vaccinium</i> Blueberry	Garlic – accumulates sulfur making a natural fungicide for raspberries; controls plum curculio
	White geranium, tansy, rue, marigold, white & pastel zinnia – to deter Japanese beetles
	Allium family plants – to deter rabbits
	Attract wrens with a nesting box – to deter other birds from the berry patch
	Berry plants in flower attract bees so plant near fruiting trees that flower at the same time
	Also try: <i>bee balm</i> and all bee plants, cilantro, <i>dill</i> , <i>fennel</i> , rue
<i>Vitis</i> Grape	<i>Chives</i> - to fight aphids
	Garlic – accumulates sulfur making a natural fungicide
	Geranium and petunia – trap crop for Japanese beetles
	<i>Datura</i> , four o’clock, castor bean – to kill Japanese beetles
	Also try: basil, bean, <i>blackberry</i> , <i>chives</i> , <i>chrysanthemum</i> , <i>daisy</i> , <i>feverfew</i> , garlic, geranium, <i>hyssop</i> , <i>lavender</i> , <i>mustard</i> , nasturtium, oregano, pea, <i>Damask and Hybrid Tea Roses</i> , <i>tansy</i>