

Give your plants a friend



Margo Roten
Ask a Master Gardener

Companion planting can help protect your veggies from garden pests

Question: I am a beginning gardener and would love to grow vegetables for my table but I am concerned about pesticides I might use on plants getting into the nearby river. Do you have any solutions for this dilemma?

Answer: One solution for you to consider is companion planting.

Simply put, whatever vegetable you plant will have a pest or pests that attack it. So, when you plant each vegetable you will also plant an herb, flower or vegetable near it that repels that pest.

The list of pest-repelling plants is a long one and includes flowers, herbs and vegetables. The strategic use of combinations of these in your vegetable garden not only helps protect it but infuses it with wonderful smells, color, beauty and bounty.

In my garden, not only do I plant annual flowers and herbs in with my vegetables, I also hang several baskets of annuals for my enjoyment and to blanket my garden with as much natural protection from these sources as possible.

After deciding what vegetables to plant, determine which plants attract the natural enemies of each plant. You will then be able to decide what you want to plant and where.



COURTESY OF ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Marigolds, lettuce and Swiss chard planted together to repel pests.

To repel mosquitoes there are many to choose from including

- common lantana
- fever tea
- lime basil
- lemongrass
- lemon thyme
- lemon balm
- rosemary

Some flowers that repel pests are:

- chrysanthemums (roaches, ants, ticks, silverfish, lice, fleas, the Japanese Beetle and the root-knot nematode)
- dahlias (nematodes)
- French marigolds (whiteflies, nematodes)
- geraniums (corn earworm, leaf hoppers and white flies)
- petunias (aphids, white flies, squash bugs, asparagus beetles and tomato hornworm)
- lavender (moths,

scorpions, water scorpions, flies, fleas, mosquitos)

- Mexican marigolds (insects and rabbits)
- narcissus (moles)
- larkspur (aphids)
- cosmos (corn earworm)
- Venus flytrap (this plant ingests insects)

Some herbs that repel pests are:

- peppermint (white flies, aphids, flea beetles, cabbage looper, squash bugs)
- rosemary (slugs, snails, Mexican beetle, cabbage looper, carrot fly and mosquitos)
- fennel (aphids, snails and slugs)
- citronella grass (insects and sometimes cats).

Some vegetables that repel pests are:

- tomato (asparagus beetles)

■ radish (cucumber beetles and cabbage maggot)

- onion (rabbits, white fly and cabbage looper)
- lettuce and leeks (carrot fly)

This is by no means a complete list. There are so many more to discover and explore. Companion planting alone will not completely protect your garden from pests, however, so be sure to combine it with other natural gardening methods of pest control.

Start out with good soil and healthy plants with appropriate light and water. Keep it weed- and debris-free and fertilized. Be prepared to inspect your plants daily and act at the first sign of pests. Remove and kill pests either by picking them off by hand, spraying them off

with water and/or a combination of water and dish soap.

You may want to use neem oil. It is natural and it kills or repels many harmful insects. It also can prevent some fungal diseases like black spot, rust, mildew and anthracnose.

Also, be sure that you are not encouraging pests by getting rid of all standing water on your property and any debris piles near your garden.

Enjoy your productive, aromatic and beautiful garden!

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at ask.extension.org/ask. Presently, the plant clinic is closed until further notice due to public safety orders.