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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Under a redwood tree, acid-loving plants flourish including ferns, azaleas, camellias, and rhododendrons. Photos Cynthia Brian

flowers, vegetables, and herbs grown together will produce more beautiful flowers and flavorful edibles than if grown in solitary confinement.

When planning your companion garden, for the team to thrive, it is important to consider these critical requirements. Determine if they enjoy the same type of soil (sandy, loamy, clay, silty, peaty), light exposure (shade, partial shade, full sun, partial sun), water (how much and how often), and pest control.

Soil: The ideal garden soil is loam as it is a balanced mixture of sand, silt, and clay with plenty of humus. To improve our clay soil, we need to improve the drainage and lighten the heaviness by adding copious amounts of organic matter. A combination of compost, mulch, and cover crops will enrich the soil, prevent erosion and minimize weed growth. ... continued from Page D12

Light: Record where the sun is during different times of the day. Remember that tall plants will provide shade for smaller plants that need protection.

Water: Roots need oxygen to survive. Waterlogged roots rot. Vegetables require about one inch of water a week, columbines prefer a moist environment, while succulents succeed in drier soils. Determine your own watering personality then choose compatible plants accordingly.

Pest Control: One of the most exciting things about companion planting is how various plants can attract good bugs and deter the bad ones when surrounded by their friends. Alliums are terrific company for almost all plants except asparagus and beans!

When building your garden, think about building a community of friends.

Roses are jewels of the garden for at least three seasons, and, as with their mineral cousins, their beauty is enhanced when placed in the right setting. According to rose expert Michael Marriott, senior rosarian and technical manager of David Austin Roses Ltd. in Albrighton, England, roses are beautifully suited to mixed garden borders. The trick to combining roses successfully with other garden plants lies in knowing which will play well together. Although we don't normally plant roses with our vegetables, rose petals are edible. Gathered early in the morning, they make a tasty topping for salads and soups.

Favorite Blue Perennials:

- Lavender
- Blue Eyed Grass
- Monkshood
- Aster
- Bellflower
- Cornflower
- Delphinium
- Sea holly
- Geranium
- Salvia

"Look for helpers. You will always find those who are helping." - Mister Rogers

After sowing seeds of beets, arugula, Swiss chard and leeks, I sat on my small white wooden bench to watch. Within minutes a black and white king snake slithered by my foot sending shivers up my spine at the sudden surprise yet joy because I know that king snakes keep rattlers away. A tailless baby lizard scampered to a rock to bask in the sunshine, and a chorus of frogs croaked their mating calls, each attempting to outdo the other. Two moths flitted through the nasturtiums, a swarm of honeybees gathered on the rosemary, and a clew of worms tilled the rich soil. A covey of quail called to one another, landing in my chestnut tree. My vegetable garden was alive with congenial visiting helpers.

For years Fred Rogers modeled the benefits of caring on his award-winning children's program, "Mister Rogers Neighborhood." The root principle of his teachings was to be a good neighbor and find helpers. Having friendly, helpful neighbors is good not only for humans but for plants and animals, too. We are all interdependent on one another for survival. To fully understand how important buddies are, we need to look no further than the kingdom of plants.

In gardening, we call this companion planting. Health and yields are improved when certain plants are grown together. Some plants will attract beneficial insects while others will repel destructive ones. Certain

flowers, vegetables, and herbs grown together will produce more beautiful flowers and flavorful edibles than if grown in solitary confinement.

Pincushion flower
Veronica
Viola
Favorite Other Colored Perennials:
Agastache
Candytuft
Chamomile
Columbine
Penstemon
Black-eyed Susan
Sedum
Verbena
Favorite Biennial
Foxglove
Favorite Annuals
Cosmos
Nicotiana
Nigella
Poppy
Sweet pea
Favorite Hedge
Boxwoods

The best partners, he says, bloom exactly together or closely overlap. "The joy is in pairing flowers that play off one another when seen side by side in full bloom. The goal is to heighten peak bloom experiences. Extending the bloom season is a different exercise.

Here is a short list of his recommended rose partners.

When it comes to vegetable companions, we have a long list of allies and enemies. General rules advise avoiding planting in long rows or big patches to deter the pests. Instead, interplant with flowers and herbs to confuse the predators and attract the beneficials.

Marigolds are the workhorse of any vegetable planting as they discourage beetles and nematodes. The presence of calendula in any garden is a plus repelling nasty insects while the roots clean the soil by establishing active relationships with soil-borne fungi. Nasturtium, chives and garlic keep away aphids. Dill improves growth and flavor in all plants of the cabbage family including kale while mint will deter ants and cabbage moth and improve the flavor of peas. However, dill will retard the growth of your carrots. Parsley, carrots and parsnip attract praying mantis, ladybugs and spiders that dine on pests. Beans, peas and clover make nitrogen that enrich the soil.

Never plant corn and tomatoes near one another as the identical worm attacks both. If you want potatoes, plant horseradish in the four corners as protection and refrain from including squash, cucumbers or sunflowers in the same location as they all suffer from the same blight. If you are growing strawberries, prevent worms by creating a border of thyme and strengthen resistance to disease and insects with borage. Oregano provides general pest protection while basil ward offs flies and mosquitoes while improving (no surprise) the flavor and growth of tomatoes.

Before you start your spring planting, consider the community you will be creating. The rains are continuing, the crabapples are blooming, and the willow buds are set to burst.

Fred Rogers said that maybe heaven is the connections we make while on earth. In gardening as in life, it takes a village.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



Dutch iris amidst ferns.



A formal pruned rose garden with companion boxwood hedges begins its spring leafing.



Blue-Eyed Grass is a native nectar plant for the Mission blue butterfly and a great companion for roses, clematis, and New Zealand flax.



California King snake enjoys living in Cynthia's vegetable garden.



Candytuft is a great border plant.



Buds of a willow tree are ready to burst open.



Cynthia Brian takes a break by the sea. Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy a copy of her new books, Growing with the Goddess Gardener and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Hire Cynthia for projects, consults, and lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com Donate to Fire Disaster Relief via Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3 at www.BethestarYouAre.org

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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