TRY COMPANION PLANTING\*

(from Your Organic Garden with Jeff Cox, p116)

“Mixing marigolds and herbs in the vegetable garden to confuse or repel plant pests is a well-known example of the practice of companion planting. Hundreds of examples of plant companions are recorded in garden lore. Modern research substantiates the effectiveness of some companion plants in repelling pests or attracting pest predators and parasites. However, the mechanisms that cause a plant to repel or attract pests remain largely unverified, and many companion planting practices continue to combine folklore and fact.

‘Evidence’ from scientific studies and gardeners’ experimentation indicates several possible benefits from companion planting:

* Masking or hiding a crop from pests
* Producing odors that confuse and deter pests
* Serving as trap crops that draw pest insects away from other plants
* Acting as ‘nurse plants’ that provide breeding grounds for beneficial insects
* Providing food to sustain beneficial insects as they search for pests
* Creating a habitat for beneficial insects

It’s interesting to find scientific justification for companion planting, and it’s fun to try your own companion planting experiments. Try the following combinations in your garden:

* Plant basil among your tomatoes to control tomato hornworms.
* Combine thyme or tomatoes with cabbage plantings to control flea beetles, cabbage maggots, white cabbage butterflies, and imported cabbageworms.
* Sow catnip by eggplant to deter flea beetles.
* Set onions in rows with carrots to control rust flies and some nematodes.
* Grow horseradish with potatoes to repel Colorado potato beetles.
* Grow radishes or nasturtiums with your cucumbers for cucumber beetle control.
* Alternate double rows of corn with double rows of snap beans or soybeans to enhance the growth of the corn.
* Interplant peanuts with corn or squash to increase the yields of both crops.
* Plant spinach, lettuce, or Chinese cabbage at the base of trellised peas, where they benefit from the shade and the wind protection.
* Grow tomatoes, parsley, or basil with asparagus to help control asparagus beetles.

Nasturtiums also deter whiteflies and squash bugs, but they are more often used as a trap crop for aphids, which prefer nasturtiums to other crops. Planting a ring of them around apple trees limits woolly aphid damage to the trees (although the nasturtiums won’t look great).