

Gardening Tips and Companion Planting

by Ray Broughton

Ray, an immensely experienced horticulturist, who taught at Sparsholt College for 37 years, gave another of his highly amusing and informative talks to the Gardeners' Club on practical gardening tips and companion planting. Some of his key tips are as follows:

- SB Plant Invigorator is an excellent foliar growth stimulant and pesticide, which is biodegradable, non-toxic and environmentally friendly. It controls a wide range of important pests including whitefly, aphid and spider mite and does not harm birds or bees.
- The blades of secateurs can be cleaned, and burrs removed, by immersing them in tomato sauce for 48 hours. It is highly effective and improves performance.
- Silver clover can be used as a Cover Crop by planting in October and digging-in during December to improve the nutrients in the soil for vegetables.
- If you find the groundsel weed in your garden or allotment, remove it immediately as it harbours many diseases.
- To prevent your camellia flowers going brown if a sharp frost is forecast, spray them with a 'fine' water mist around 6 o'clock in the evening. As the water freezes it releases latent heat which protects the flower heads.
- To improve the density of your lawn and prevent the establishment of broadleaved weeds and moss, use Browntop bent and Fescue grasses.
- Humming lines can be used on allotments to scare birds away. They are not very friendly when used in proximity to housing as the continuous hum could annoy both you and your neighbours!

He then turned to companion planting as an organic and natural pest control method. Some common examples are:

- Alyssum attracts hoverflies which predate aphids.
- Marigolds are among the most important companion plants to help control aphids, blackfly and greenfly. They attract ladybirds and hoverflies as well as bees for pollination. The pungent smell of French marigolds deters whitefly from tomato plants. Whiteflies are also kept at bay by basil and nasturtiums which they find unpleasant.
- Brassicas are a main food source for caterpillars. Planting nasturtiums among them will attract butterflies to lay most of their eggs on the nasturtiums leaving the cabbages, cauliflowers, sprouts and broccoli for you to eat.
- Rosemary placed in a pot near cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbages or beans will deter cabbage moths and carrot flies due to the oils in the plant.
- Tarragon is disliked by many pests due to its scent and taste. Nearly all vegetables grow well with it.
- Thyme makes a good companion with cabbage, deterring the cabbage worms.

If you wish to know more about natural pest control methods, Ray highly recommended the book "Companion Planting: The Vegetable Gardeners guide to the role of Flowers, Herbs and Organic thinking" by James Paris.

Written by Robert Blake, November 2018