

TOM'S GARDEN

BLOG

APRIL 2023

Deer Resistant

I have talked about this subject before, but I think it is worth revisiting.

Deer can be a problem in the urban as well as the suburban garden. Deer populations are rising due to hunting laws and the fact that there are no natural predators.

Deer just love tulips, hostas, daylilies, and many of our ornamental plants. There is good news if you want to plant deer-resistant plants.

Deer will avoid plants that have a strong fragrance, bitter taste, or a fuzzy texture.

Here is a list of a few plants they will avoid:

Oriental poppy Poppies contain alkaloids that are toxic to deer.

Yarrow Yarrow has a bitter taste that deer don't like.

Peonies Peonies have a scent that we love but deer will avoid.

Coneflowers Coneflowers attract butterflies but not deer, they are somewhat fuzzy.

Foxglove Foxglove blooms early when deer are sampling and is poisonous.

Daffodils Daffodils contain calcium oxalate which is poisonous.

Lily-of-the-Valley is poisonous and has a strong scent that deer will not like.

Bee Balm Bee balm attracts bees and butterflies, blooms all summer, but deer leave it alone.

Herbs Any of the herbs such as basil, rosemary, mint, and thyme will deter deer.

Geraniums Deer also hate geraniums, especially scented geraniums.

Placing these plants near others that deer might eat may deter them.

As always, remember that if deer are really hungry they will eat almost anything.

I live in the country with soybean and corn fields all around me and my closest neighbor has German shepherds. I really don't have a deer problem. I do, however, have a rabbit and groundhog problem.

Mountain Mint attracts many pollinators but not deer.

How to keep creeping Charlie from creeping back

Too much shade, wet soil, and poor fertility makes creeping Charlie thrive and it also grows well in full sun. It will invade the edges of your yard and flower beds.

Hand weeding is an option, but you must get rid of every bit of the roots. Don't put it in the compost bin, either, bag it up with the trash. The most effective broadleaf herbicide for creeping Charlie contains Triclopyr with 2,4-D. Standard herbicides don't work as well and Roundup will also kill the grass. As always, read and follow the label directions to avoid harming yourself and the environment.

The Great Potato Famine

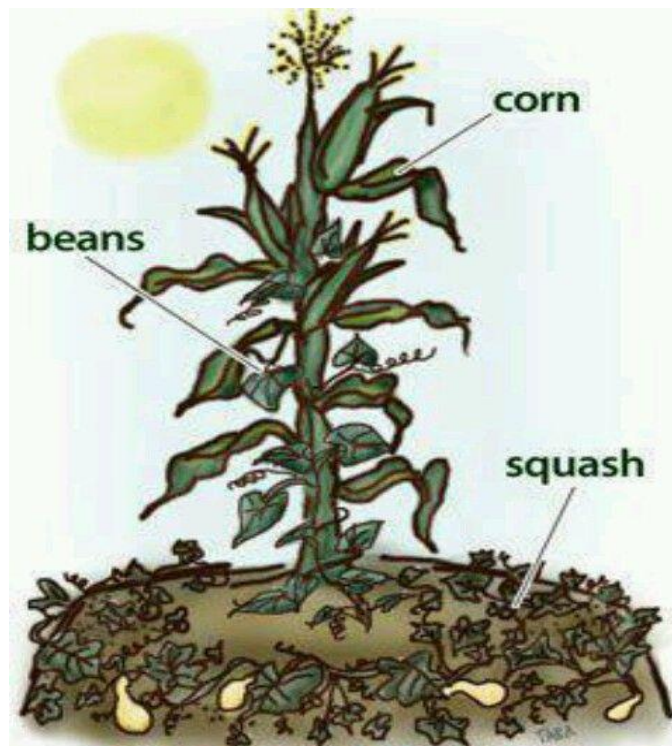
White potatoes from the highlands of Peru and Bolivia were introduced into Europe in the sixteenth century. In Ireland, where growing conditions were ideal, potatoes became the staple food for a rapidly growing population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1845 a cool, rainy summer encouraged the spread of the fungus *Phytophora infestans*, which destroyed 75 percent of the crop. Three million people eventually starved to death, and a wave of emigrants to North America was set in motion.

Companion Planting

Companion planting is one of those traditional gardening strategies that makes a lot of sense. Long before there were pesticides, herbicides, and packaged fertilizers, people planted certain plants together for their greatest benefit to each other. There is evidence of this type of gardening from around the world and probably started thousands of years ago when people began farming and gave up the nomadic lifestyle.

One example from North America stands out: the planting of the “Three Sisters” by Native Americans.



**Direct-Sow, Easy-to-Grow:
The Ancient *Three Sisters* Method**

Europeans arriving here learned of the companion planting of beans, corn, and squash. The corn provided support for the climbing beans, the beans added nitrogen to the soil, and the leaves of the squash plants acted as a mulch to keep soil cool and prevent weeds.

As you can see, companion planting is nothing new. Every year and every new book that is written on the subject always has some new discoveries that gardeners were not aware of before.

There is a lot of gardening lore concerning this subject that is difficult to dismiss and difficult to prove beyond doubt. The reason for inconclusive proof is because of all the differences in soil make-up, growing conditions, and climate of various gardens. What works for one gardener may not work for another, but companion planting is certainly worth a try.

Helpful Companions

Certain herbs, weeds, flowers, and vegetables have the effect of deterring insects and encouraging plant growth when planted near compatible plants. Borage, chamomile, and lovage are supposed to enhance growth and flavor in nearby vegetables. Garlic planted near roses should deter aphids. Mint, sage, and rosemary are the traditional enemies of cabbage moths. Nasturtiums, which actually attract aphids and are a useful trap crop, are sometimes erroneously listed as an aphid repellent. Catnip is often planted to deter flea beetles. Dill attracts wasps that eat cabbage worms. Plant radish near squash and cucumbers. It acts as a trap crop.

There is no question that monoculture planting encourages heavier insect populations. Studies have proven that diversified plantings suffer much less insect damage than one-crop fields with no spraying needed. The practice of mixing aromatic herbs and flowers with vegetables attracts beneficial insects and pollinators and promotes good plant health.

French, or single-flowered marigolds have a nematode-suppressing effect; nematodes can cause a lot of plant destruction underground where they are never seen. It is sometimes necessary to plant the flowers in the same spot several years in a row to get the full benefit. I have never found marigolds to repel deer or rabbits.

Catnip (*nepeta cataria*) has been shown to repel 17 species of insects but be careful because it can be invasive if let go to seed. Just pick off the spent flowers. I have found it to repel flea beetles. Catnip is native to Europe. Cat mint (*nepeta mussinii*) is a perennial and mostly sterile, which means it doesn't go to seed. You will see it as a landscaping plant around public buildings and banks. Cat mint blooms for a long time with large flower heads. Catmint also attracts beneficial pollinators.

Thinning Plants

Direct seeding outdoors is a ritual that links us with people of past generations of long ago. Usually, seeds are sown too thickly and will need to be thinned out. When I first started gardening, thinning seemed to be very wasteful until I discovered that unthinned lettuce makes a poor crop and

carrots twine around each other and stay small. Each vegetable needs a certain amount of space to grow to its potential. Even garlic, when planted too closely, will remain small. Thinning is painful but growing crowded, second rate, small plants is much worse.

Most plants that have been direct seeded in the ground will need to be thinned. Most seed packets will instruct you to plant, then thin out the seedlings. Thinning should be done early to minimize damage to the plants you want to keep. No doubt you will notice an improvement in the growth of the remaining plants with more space around them.

Spacing varies with each plant and it is a good idea to follow the recommended spacing on the seed packet. All plants need room to grow.

STRIPED CUCUMBER BEETLE

Hosts A wide variety of vegetables, although cucumber, melon, squash, and other cucurbits are preferred and most severely damaged.

Damage Adult beetles feed on emergent seedlings and can retard development or even kill young plants. Later they may be found in large numbers in flowers of squash or melon and may chew pits in fruit. Larvae feed on the roots, causing little apparent injury, but may move into the rind of ripening melon fruit that rests on the soil. Adult beetles can transmit a bacterium that produces bacterial wilt in cucurbits. Striped cucumber beetle is also a vector of cucumber mosaic virus.

