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October 2015 Newsletter



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Next Meet

Monday, 12 Oct,
7.30pm
Milford Primary
30 Shakespeare Rd
Milford

**TOPIC: Making
smoothies from
weeds & bliss balls!**

Last meet

Are you adventurous with herbs in your cooking, or do you stick with tried and tested recipes and combinations?

We had a delightful evening at the last North Shore Herb Group meeting discussing the many ways in which we can use our culinary herbs in our cooking (and raw food!).

Thank you Helen for the list of which herbs and spices to use in different dishes.



In the Garden

October is a very busy month in the garden—and although there are always the tasks of weeding, feeding and general upkeep, October should be mostly devoted to planting, planting and planting!

With night time temperatures warming up, and the threats of frosts (nearly) all gone, it is a good time to start planting out seedlings of your cold-tender summer vegetables, e.g. tomatoes, capsicums, cucumbers, and aubergines.

It is also a great time to plant your salad crops, remembering to sow eve-

ry two to three weeks for a continuous crop. And make sure you have planted all your berries and small fruits too.

October is pretty much the best time to plant out, or sow almost any vegetable, herb, flowering annual or perennial. So time to get busy!

While you are out in the garden, working out what to plant where, take a read through this month's feature on companion planting and give it a go! Not only do these companions normally look really pretty in the garden, they do a good job of ensuring you have fewer pests, and greater garden productivity.

Calendula Salve



Calendulas are starting to flower in the garden, and will flower all summer long. Leaving you with a profusion of calendula petals. What better way to preserve this goodness than to make an herbal healing salve!

First, you'll need to make a calendula infused oil (which is good to use on its own too!) - simply place calendula flower petals in a wide mouthed jar and top up with a good quality olive oil—just enough to cover all the petals. If using fresh petals, wilt for a few hours to remove most of the moisture. Leave in a warm and sunny spot and infuse for 3-4 weeks (giving it a gentle shake each day).

Now, to make a basic healing salve, you simply need your calendula oil, beeswax and if you wish, some essential oil (such as Lavender). Melt 15g of beeswax with 100ml of your strained calendula oil over a double boiler, stir in essential oil (about 25 drops) and pour in jars. Cool and seal. Use on chapped and cracked skin, burns and scrapes.

Companion Planting

What is Companion Planting

Companion planting is simply a system by which certain plants are grouped together in the garden, or even not planted in close proximity, according to the purported effects they have on each other.



Planting marigolds (*Tagetes spp*) in vegetable garden borders as insect deterrent.

People have planted certain crops with their companions for thousands of years—the mosquito fern alongside rice paddies one example, and the 3-sisters method by which the native Americans grew squash, beans and corn together long before European settlement, another.



Garlic makes a great companion to roses.

Companion planting gained momentum in the 1970's as part of the organic growing movement, and today is commonly practiced as a part of permaculture methodology.

Reasons to Companion Plant

The phenomenon where different plants thrive more when planted close together, can be attributed to one (or more) of the three “P”s of companion planting: Pest Control, Pollination and Productivity.

Pest Control

Possibly the best known, and most widely practiced companion planting is done toward eliminating insect pest problems.

The scent of flowers, or even leaves of certain plants act as natural deterrents for insect pests, e.g. Marigolds (*Tagetes spp*) and Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*). Even the root secretions of some companion plants may keep soil pests at bay.

Planting companions which pests prefer over the original host crop also helps control pest damage in the garden. Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) is an effective sacrificial crop or trap crop as it attracts pests away from the main crop, e.g. aphids from roses, and caterpillars from cabbages.



While some companions deter the bad insects, or attract them away from your main crop, another set of companions can be chosen because they are a perfect habitat for beneficial insects, particularly those that prey on insect pests.

The flowers of yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and lacy tansy (*Phacelia tanacetifolia*) attract hoverflies for example, while dill (*Anethum graveolens*) and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) are good for lacewings, and ladybugs find golden Marguerites (*Anthemistinctoria*) and tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) irresistible.



Yarrow attracts hoverflies.

Pollination

Planting ornamentals between your herbs and vegetables (or vegetables in your aesthetic garden) has become quite fashionable. And for good reason too - all the pretty and perfumed flowers attract pollinators!

All the buzz these days is planting for bees, and the list of plants that attract pollinators

Companion Plants



Bee visiting borage

such as birds, bees, bumblebees, butterflies, moths, and even wasps to our gardens is very long. A few examples of which are borage (*Borago officinalis*), bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) and lavender (*Lavandula* spp).

Productivity

Intercropping companionable plants allows gardeners to use space most effectively without compromising on crop quality. Planting radishes and lettuces in close proximity, for example, or lettuces in the shade of a cucumber trellis, are good examples of using plants beneficially alongside each other to maximise space. A classical example of this is the 3-sisters method of growing beans, squash and corn together.



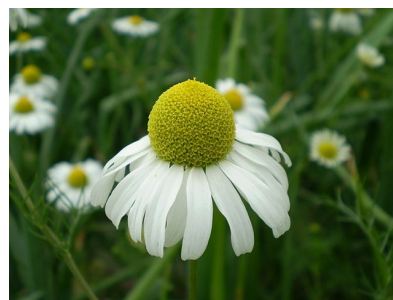
Many square foot garden plans and food forest gardening takes intercropping into consideration.

The end result of all companion planting aims to be a happier crop plant, with less pest damage, growing optimally in an agreeable environment, and having had its flowers pollinated so that it may produce abundantly.

It is often said that tomatoes grown with basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) as companions are stronger, healthier, more productive and that the fruit simply taste better. This friendship in particular also carries through to the table—tomato and basil go well together fresh or cooked. :)

The fourth “P”

There is another set of plants I would like to include in the companion tables, a group I’m going to call imProvers as they can be used to improve the plants and soil in your garden (thanks to my friend Heather for the name!)...



Chamomile

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) is a good companion to bring up mineral nutrients from deep down as their tap roots can extend more than 3m! The leaves are great in the compost, or to make a foliar feed for the garden.

Yarrow leaves (*Achillea millefolium*) activates compost and is said to speed decomposition too.

Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile* and *Matricaria recutita*) are physician plants - said to revive any ailing plant it is grown in proximity to.

Does it really work

Companion planting has many sceptics, and while some claims have been scientifically proven to be at least somewhat true, simply planting supposed companions together is not a miracle cure, or the answer to all your gardening problems. A garden should always be considered as a whole, and companion planting should just be another tool with which the gardener can work toward the end result they desire.

That said, I personally have always gardened according to companion planting principles (at least since I got to know about them!), and have had really good results.

Don’t be put off by the long lists and complicated charts on companion planting. Start small, and basic, and expand on that as you gain confidence.

