

April 2022: Companion plants

The first year we were in Bradwell vicarage we started planting vegetables far too late, as we were still clearing enough brambles to make a vegetable patch. Last year we started planting far too early, as I was over-enthusiastic. This year? Well, time will tell. But this year we have also set ourselves the goal of learning more about companion planting.

Companion planting is a very old gardening technique, perhaps best seen in the jumble of traditional cottage gardens, where flowers and vegetables grow side by side in apparently random confusion. In the days before artificial pesticides and herbicides, the best way of getting a healthy yield was to grow plants that supported and protected one another, deterring pests and supplying nutrients. Recent research suggests that it still is; producing not only better yields but also being good for soil health and for entire ecosystems, and of course free from all the harmful side effects of using chemicals. Across the world, farmers and gardeners are re-learning the interdependence of natural communities, and re-learning that 'weeds' are often playing a vital role in the health of our planet, our gardens, our farmland. So, as someone who has always refused to use any chemicals in my gardening, companion planting seemed an obvious skill to learn.

As a Christian, I love too the way companion planting models God's values; values he longs for us to live by. Companion planting is, for me, a wonderful picture of the interdependence and mutual care that is God's will not only between humans, but between humanity and creation. In God's kingdom there is no such thing as a weed, no such thing as something without value. In God's kingdom, every human and every part of creation has a unique role to play, and unique gifts to contribute. And in God's kingdom, the whole is always made poorer by the loss or the harming of any individual, human or otherwise.

So this year, as I learn about companion planting in my vegetable patch, I will also be praying that each time I plant or harvest it will remind me to look at how I relate to God's world in other ways, reminding me to notice and value things that I could easily take for granted. And remind me too to always be making changes to my lifestyle, to increase the good and decrease the harm I do to God's world.

Yours in Christ,
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