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COMPANION PLANTING FOR ROSES

Organic gardeners know that a diverse mix of plants makes for a healthy and beautiful garden. Many also believe that certain plant combinations have extraordinary (some even believe mysterious) powers for helping each other grow. Scientific study of companion planting has confirmed that some combinations have real benefits unique to those combinations. And practical experience has demonstrated to many gardeners how to mate certain plants for their mutual benefit. It is my feeling that as we experiment with different plants, we will instinctively choose those that we believe will do well for us in our gardens. And we will probably end up digging up some of our choices and tossing them into the compost pile. But a gardener's joy, it seems to me, is the challenge and the rewards of our choices. So let the compost chips fall and welcome to Spring!

Roses are a favorite in anyone's ornamental garden. The problem with roses is that while the tops of the plants are pretty, the bottoms of the plant can be somewhat sparse and leggy. Some gardeners under-plant their roses with other plants that will hide their bottoms. I have put together a list of some plants that will serve that purpose very well. For taller growing or climbing roses, you can interplant with clematis. They look good together and both will benefit from the applications of rose food.

Here are some plants that will compliment roses:

Diascia is an annual and a good choice to plant with roses: both prefer fertile, moist, well-draining soil and full sun. It requires regular to moderate watering, depending on the temperature. These summer-blooming plants can be cut back after the first bloom flush to force another set of flowers. Tuck the plant into the soil near the base of the rose.

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthemium*) is a compact, aggressive perennial plant. It blooms all summer, producing white or yellow flowers, and does best with full sun and regular water. This plant would look great in a bed of miniature roses or among midsize roses. Feverfew is a great filler flower for bouquets. It is a good cutting flower. I have gotten second growth blooms by cutting them back after the first flush of bloom.

Catmint (*Nepeta faassenii*), a perennial, requires afternoon shade in hot climates and moderate water. Related to catnip, it has a spreading growth habit. The blooms are sky-blue and the plants have grey-green foliage.

Remove faded blooms for another flush of color. Catmint is a great ground cover plant for bush roses in pots. It will trail beautifully over the pot edges.

Annual Lobelia is a low-growing annual flowering plant that does well in containers or as a ground cover. It requires partial shade in hot climates and ample water. The flower colors range from white, pink, violet to dark blue and purple.

Annual Alyssum is another low-growing, fragrant ground cover plant that does well in containers or as a ground cover. It comes in colors ranging from white to pinks and purples and mixes of those colors. It is easy to grow and will compliment your roses.

After planting, water the soil or container to settle the plants into their new home. Fertilize the roses and plants with a balanced fertilizer after new growth begins on the roses. Watch for signs of fungal diseases on the roses. Spray as needed for pests.

INSECT FIGHTING TIPS:

The following herbs and flowers will complement your roses and they can also help discourage pests. They will be welcome additions to your garden and the roses will love them.

Roses with garlic, chives and onions: Gardeners have been planting garlic with roses for eons, because garlic is said to repel rose pests. Garlic chives work well as a repellent, and their small purple or white flowers in late spring looks great with rose flowers and foliage. Onions also are a great companion plants for roses and it is said that roses will be more fragrant if alliums are planted nearby.

Lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*) Planted near roses, Lavender is thought to help keep aphids away. It is drought tolerant, requiring full sun, moderate water and a fast-draining soil with little fertilizer needed. Prune them immediately after bloom to keep the plants neat. Gather the flowers and dry them for many uses. Their foliage and the flowers are very fragrant and slightly pungent. Perhaps the essential oils discourage the aphids.

Sages and Thymes are also pungent. Their essential oils are very powerful. These plants are thought to keep caterpillars away. They require full sun and fast-draining soil. These herbs are also great kitchen herbs and you can use them in your cooking.

Marigolds can help control harmful nematodes and they repel many insect pests. They require full sun, regular water and fast-draining soil, although they are very tough plants and will tolerate a variety of conditions. Their bright colors will enhance your rose beds.

Parsley is not only a good-looking herb; it is a great culinary plant and acts as a deterrent to insects that bother roses. Easy to grow, just cut it back when it gets leggy, if you haven't cut it to use in your kitchen, and it will grow a new flush of foliage.