

## **Making Ripples**

### **Stop Wildlife from Gobbling the Garden**

by Amanda Bancroft

A reader recently asked, “There is a family of chipmunks that eat my plants that I grow in containers. I’ll put them up high so that they can’t get to them. How can I keep them away from them in the meantime? Deer get to the plants also.”

As a master naturalist, I don’t have as much knowledge as a master gardener would have about how to keep wildlife from eating a garden. I can tell you that chipmunks are excellent climbers, though, so height may not deter them. I’m the sort of gardener that grew peas in a container and was overjoyed the moment they were all devoured by a juvenile groundhog, because watching it made me high on life and enabled great photos to be taken at close range. But some general rules of thumb that I learned from experience are: plant decoys, companion plant with wildlife deterring species, and use natural repellents.

All of nature is interconnected. In other words, things that aren’t locked up tighter than a high security prison will be infiltrated by something or other. Some farmers find that planting more than what they need helps distract wildlife from eating everything. It’s a sacrifice, but very generous of those who leave a little for the birds and bees who make life a joy to witness. Planting things that wildlife love (or even putting out feeders for the problem animal) away from things that they only like a little may deter them from eating that which you wish they wouldn’t. However, it’s likely that nature will get to your plants before you do, in one way or another.

Enter companion planting, which exists somewhere between myth and useful gardening skill. Sometimes it works, sometimes it’s documented by scientific studies, and sometimes it’s an old wives’ tale. But it’s worth trying, if you decide your situation matches the situation in some studies that demonstrated the effectiveness of companion planting a certain species for a specific goal. Pick a plant and a goal for it, and research studies which prove or disprove the benefits of companion planting in that context.

By surrounding your beloved crops with Mexican marigolds, for example, it can deter rabbits from desiring to get close, according to the University of Illinois. Beware, they also attract spider mites in hot weather. Certain varieties of marigolds are proven better at fighting off nematodes in the soil. Marigolds contain pyrethrum, an ingredient found in some insect repellents which mosquitoes and other bugs do not like.

For natural repellents made from household spices, cayenne pepper seems to be the most praised. Rain will wash away the spicy effects, so it will need reapplied after each rainfall. You can sprinkle cayenne powder or spray cayenne solution on leaves to give the chipmunks and deer a big surprise! This won’t harm them or blind them, but causes temporary discomfort. Good luck!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: [www.RipplesBlog.org](http://www.RipplesBlog.org).