

The Alternative Kitchen Garden

Episode 66 transcript



Hello and welcome to episode 66 of the Alternative Kitchen Garden. I'm Emma and today I'm going to be talking about plants that help you control pests, but first of all I've got a few announcements.

First of all, if you remember, this time last year (in AKG episode 15) we were talking about courgettes (that's zucchini in other parts of the world) and we had some lovely seeds from Seeds of Italy to give away – and we were going to run a trial of courgettes, you were going to tell me how you got on. Here in the UK it was a rotten year last year, and certainly my courgettes didn't do very much at all. So this year I thought we could try again, and if you've got some of these Seeds of Italy courgette seeds from last year (or if you've bought your own this year) then do let me know how you get on, later in the year. I'm growing Tromba d'Albenga, which is a long, funny-shaped courgette, so that's going to be fun. I do have about half a dozen more packets of courgette seeds to give away, so if you are in the UK and you would like one of those then do send me an email (to akgpodcast@gmail.com) with your name and address, and I'll send those out to the first people to respond.

And if you're a fan of Seeds of Italy then you'll be pleased to hear that they've got a book coming out, about their seeds and some of the recipes that you can make from them. So that's going to be very exciting, but I don't think it's going to be ready until Christmas time. However, if you order it from their website (and I'll put a link in the show notes to that for you) not only will you get it 3 months earlier than anyone who's buying theirs in the shop but you'll get a £5 discount as well. That might be worth doing if you're a big fan of Seeds of Italy.

Now I'm going to move on to the emails that you've been sending in. I've had one from Brian (in Fulham) after the achocha programme. He was listening to the achocha programme and he was thinking about going and finding some achocha seeds so he could grow it in his back garden, and then he found out that his housemate had

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brought back some seeds from a trip to Brazil - so that was very fortunate for Brian, and he's going to be growing achocha this year.

And I've had a couple of emails that go way back to the early shows and my problems with water butts. If you remember, my water butts leak round the taps (and I haven't fixed it yet, just in case you're wondering, but I'm getting there!). Robb in America writes the Sustainable Living blog, and there's a link to that on the show home page – there's a list of AKG fans, and if you'd like your website to be in that list then by all means send me an email with your link. Anyway, Robb in America says he used Teflon tape on the threads on his taps as they screwed in and that worked very well, and you can also use silicon caulk, so there's a couple of ideas there from Robb.

And Mark Hudson in Cambridge recommends Araldite Rapid to glue everything together and seal it all up, so I might be trying that as well. Mark has another tip, about using nettle concentrate. We've been talking on the show about making liquid feeds out of comfrey, but you can do the same thing with nettles. If you drown them in a bucket of water for a few weeks, so that they rot down underwater, the resulting concentrate makes an excellent liquid feed for your plants – although I'm afraid it does stink, absolutely stink. Apparently Mark says that it also deters cabbage white butterflies, no doubt because cabbage white butterflies choose the plants they're going to lay their eggs on by tasting them with their feet – so if they tread on something that's been well dosed with stinky nettle concentrate then I suspect they go “bleurgh!” and fly off! So if you have problems with cabbage white butterflies on your brassicas then try some nettle concentrate – if you can stand the smell!

That brings us nicely on to today's topic, which is pest control plants – plants that help you control pests, indoors or out. And so we've got a few topics to think about there. The first is companion planting. We've mentioned this before, and companion planting (at its simplest) is just mixing in flowers and herbs with your vegetables, because a monoculture just attracts pests and diseases. If you spread things out a bit you'll attract some beneficial insects to your garden, which will help with pollination and pest control, and you'll also confuse and repel some pests that find their prey plants by smell, and things like that. If you've got a big block of plants that are all the same then their pests are going to have no trouble finding it; if you mix and match a bit then they're going to have a bit of a harder job jumping from one plant to another. And you can also use plants a trap crops, and we mentioned that in the episode on nasturtiums – you can use nasturtiums to keep the cabbage white butterflies away from your brassicas, because they'll eat the nasturtiums instead.

One of the main flowers that I use for companion planting is marigolds. Mine are dwarf French marigolds and I mix them in with my tomatoes and that is apparently to repel whitefly – and it must work because I've never had whitefly on my tomatoes! So marigolds are good at getting rid of pests with tomatoes and you can plant some by the door to your greenhouse (indoors or out, doesn't matter) or around the tomatoes themselves or anywhere that you think you might have problems with whitefly.

Generally what you're looking for is anything that flowers and has a scent, so if it's strongly scented it's probably going to have some sort of pest repellent properties,

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because it will just start confusing pests. Other plants that are good include lavender (which of course is a lovely smell for us, but has some pest repellent tendencies). You can use Calendula (pot marigolds), a useful plant in the kitchen garden because you can use the petals to colour rice instead of saffron and stuff like that, and you can eat them in salad. And Tagetes, that's marigolds, so all of the marigolds really are good for a kitchen garden and companion planting.

The second topic I'm going to talk about is plants which actually act as insect repellents. So we've got the Shoo Fly plant, which is sold as the Shoo Fly plant but it's *Nicandra physaloides* (I'll put the name in the show notes for you) and it's a member of the same plant family as tomatoes and peppers, so it has some pretty flowers and it's quite a fast growing annual. If you've got real problems with flies in your garden then you might want to try that one.

But we've also got some plants that work in the garden and indoors, so if you've got pest problems inside the house then you might want to consider some of these.... Nigella seeds make a lovely moth deterrent, so you can put those in with your linens to stop them being munched by moths over the winter. Garlic juice makes a very good insect repellent if you rub it on your skin – but you have to be pretty brave to stink of garlic for the rest of the day. The good news is that if you don't fancy stinking of garlic then you can use garlic juice to soothe any bites and stings that result from you not having any insect protection!

Sweet flag is a pond marginal, meaning it grows in the boggy area around ponds, and when it's growing it deters mosquitoes, so that's a fabulous thing to have in the garden. And the dried plant itself will repel insects, so it's one of a number of plants that when dried repel insects - you might want to turn them into pot pourri. They used to be used as strewing herbs, of course, when people used to have hard floors they put hay and straw and strewing herbs on the floor to cut down on the smells and the ick – because they could brush the straw and the strewing herbs out and replace them every so often.

French tarragon, another herb that you might have in the garden, both dried and growing (so the plant and its dried parts) will act as an insect repellent. However, the problem with French tarragon is (as you might have found out) that slugs love it – so you'll have to protect it from slugs in order for it to protect you from flies.

Daisy leaves, apparently, if you infuse them in water, give them a liquid that repels insects. You might prefer that to the garlic juice – it probably doesn't smell as bad. Chamomile is another plant that, both dried and growing, is an insect repellent. As is lemon balm, so you can grow lemon balm by the back door or under your windows, or you can bring bunches indoors and hang them up to dry, and all of those will repel insects for you.

And oregano is another one. When it's growing, oregano repels insects. So having a herb garden outside your kitchen door is not only handy (for picking herbs and taking them right into the kitchen) but it will also help with any pest problems over the summer. And if you've got ants then try growing pennyroyal, that's a member of the

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mint family and so you'll probably want to keep it in a pot or it will take over your garden. Pennyroyal is, apparently, especially good at repelling ants. Dried fennel helps to deter fleas, so if you've got a cat or a dog then put some dried fennel in their bedding and it might help to keep them flea-free.

The last pest repellent plant that I'm going to mention today is in a category all of its own, because it's the Scardy Cat plant (*Coleus canina*) and it repels bigger pests. Mammals, like cats and dogs, do not like the smell. The Scardy Cat plant I've grown in my garden, because I had a huge problem with cats before I put the fence up, and it's a green plant – it's not like the coleus that you would grow for the coloured leaves, it's a plain green plant. It's a tender annual, so you'll need to buy fresh plants each year or take cuttings and overwinter those. It has a very herby smell. It's quite strong, if you brush against the leaves you will have the smell on your hand. It's not entirely unpleasant, but it is quite strong and because of that it's supposed to repel cats and dogs from your garden. I suspect it has a limited effect, so if there are particular areas that you don't want cats to come into in your garden then you could ring them with Scardy Cat plants. As I said, I have tried it and I probably didn't have enough plants to protect the whole garden, and as such I didn't find it terribly effective – but if you're at your wit's end with cats then you can give that a go.

That's a quick run down of plants you can use to repel pests, both in the garden and in the home. If you've got any comments, or hints and tips of your own on this subject then do get in touch. The email address, as always, is akgpodcast@gmail.com, or you can leave a comment on the show homepage, which is <http://coopette.com/akg>. And there's a Facebook group, so come and join us there if you're on Facebook. And the new thing this week is that the Alternative Kitchen Garden itself is Twittering, so there are real-time updates for things that I'm doing in the garden as and when I pop out there. If you're on Twitter, have a look at <http://twitter.com/akgpodcast>, and you can see what's going on. In the meantime, have a great week in your garden. Goodbye!

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