

Crop Rotation-Who Needs It?

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You are what you eat! In a day and age when increasing attention is paid to the quality of the food we eat, more and more people want to grow their own food. As a hallmark for sustainable farming, crop rotation minimizes problems down the road while preserving soil structure and health.

Crop rotation is not just for the farmers - it can be put to use in small plots of land as well. By rotating crops each season, we promote a natural method of pest control which helps to break disease cycles that can occur when the same crop is grown in the same spot for successive years. For example, Clubroot is a soil borne fungus that affects brassicas, and accumulates from successive growth in the same location. Monocropping also depletes the soil of nutrients specific to that crop. In the same way our bodies can ache if we do the same thing over and over, the soil can get tired if we plant the same vegetable, year after year in the same spot.

Simply put, crop rotation requires you to avoid growing the same crop in the same spot year after year. Plant your like-family vegetables in a different spot than the previous year and rotate your different crops like a cycle. It's helpful that some vegetables will replenish lost nutrients back to the soil after a crop has been harvested. It helps to grow legumes after heavy feeders like corn or leafy vegetables. While you're at it, add in some green manure to enrich the soil. No matter what vegetables you are growing, there are many rotations to suit your needs. You decide!

Remember that any crop rotation is a work in progress, and much of the enjoyment and challenge comes from experimenting with it each year as you learn from previous years. By keeping in mind a few things, it will make it much easier to work out a suitable rotation for you.

Know botanical names of your vegetables and group vegetables from the same family together

- Explore the internet - there are a wealth of resources awaiting your discovery

Keep a notebook handy to keep accurate records and any observations

Grow green manure - they enrich the soil like essential nutrients for the soul

Alternate deep-rooted and shallow-rooted crops to promote a balanced draw

Leafy vegetables generally use a lot of nitrogen - plant soil builders prior

Some basic types of groupings that may work for you include: heavy feeders (broccoli, lettuce, tomatoes, eggplant, corn, squash); light feeders (carrots, turnips, sweet potatoes, peppers, garlic, onions, chives); nitrogen fixing (soil builders - green beans, lima beans, peas, soybeans); green manures (clover, vetch, alfalfa, rye, buckwheat).