



Above photos courtesy of Star Roses & Plants

Mixing Roses with Companion Plants in the Garden

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Since the 19th Century, monoculture growing allowed growers to specialize in one plant and purchase only tools and product needed to support that variety. This practice changed in the 1970's due to the organic gardening movement. Today, we know that monocultures are more susceptible to insects/diseases and require more applications of pesticides.

Pictured: Gertrude Jekyll with salvia and lupines



Not all plants play well with roses which don't like to be crowded and need an open area around them for air circulation and room in the ground so that their roots don't compete with other plants. The nutrition, soil pH,

moisture and sun/shade needs of companions also need to match those for roses. (Pictured: Left, English Rose Vanessa Bell and Verbena bonariensis. Right, Lady of Shallot with blue salvia. -- David Austin Roses photos.)

David Austin Roses, Ltd.. has the best example of companion planting with roses that I have ever seen. The company recommends rose companions be planted 3' away from roses with at least 2' between mature rose bushes. This means that some advance planning is necessary to ensure that every plant has the space needed to live in an uncrowded environment.



Darcey Bussell rose, Nepeta 'Kit Kat,' Heuchera 'Obsidian'
courtesy of David Austin Roses. Ltd.

Plants that DO NOT make good bed neighbors for roses:

- Have aggressive root systems like mint, wisteria and trees;
- Have shrubby top growth that blocks light and prevents good air circulation (hibiscus);
- Require dappled shade and different soil pH, like azaleas;
- Vines with aggressive growth habits (e.g. cypress, hyacinth bean, and honeysuckle vines);
- Strangling groundcovers (lantana and Asiatic jasmine) that invade the rose's growing space;

- Some Mediterranean-type herbs that prefer a hot dry environment. Rosemary does not appreciate the same amount of water that roses need.

Good rose companions include:

- Herbs like blue-green Bell Pepper Basil (a cold tolerant variety that comes back year after year), garlic, chives, dill, thyme, sage, catmint, and parsley.



Companion vines for climbing roses — left, Rosarium Uetersen and clematis. Right, Patriot Dream shrub with geranium 'Rozanne.' Gaye Hammond photos

- Perennials like compact Golden Dewdrop Duranta, pentas, milkweed, foxglove, delphinium, scabiosa (pincushion plant), salvia 'Mystic Spires' and sages 'Henry Duelberg' and 'Wendy's Wish' do well with roses.
- Annual plants like heat-loving lobelia varieties can be used to spill over the borders of planting beds and dianthus can be tucked away in small spaces.
- Only one vine makes my list and that is non-invasive clematis varieties which help expand a climbing rose's color season.

I get much more pleasure from a garden with roses as opposed to a rose garden all by itself.