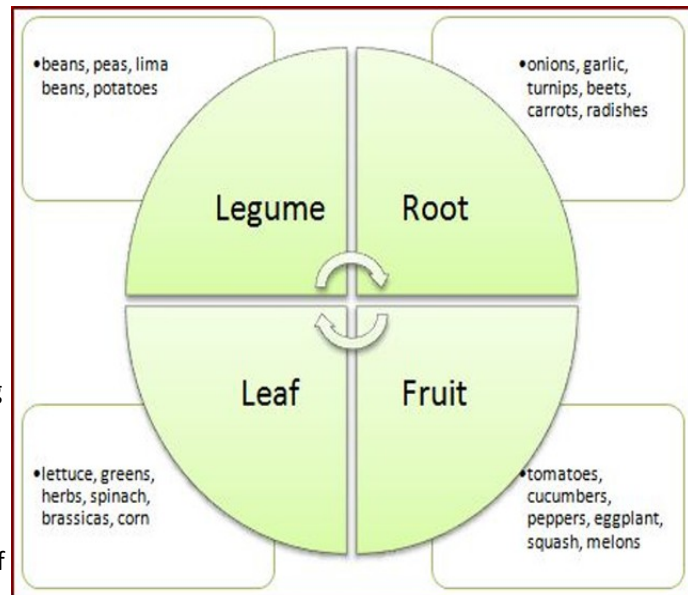


Thinking About Spring?

Published 11/13/19 – Public domain image titled “Garden Crop Rotation Detail” from labath.info

A popular winter past time for a lot of gardeners is perusing the seed and plant catalogs. There's still plenty of time for that as the majority of catalogs are still to come. How do I know this? Well, at our house we get roughly 100 billion of these catalogs each year. Maybe it's only 99 billion, but we're no where near that figure yet. We even get a couple addressed to a cat that's been dead for almost 20 years. There's something fun about dreaming what next year's garden could bring but instead of wishful thinking, and now is a great time for some spring planning thoughts that will more than pay off next year.

Before the memory of where things were in the vegetable garden fade away, make a summary of what was planted where. Draw a map, take pictures, describe in detail, whatever works best for you. Whichever method you use, just make sure it's something that you can understand 6 months from now. Most important is where different crops were planted. Better, although certainly not necessary, would be expanding from “here were the tomatoes” to something like “Better Boys were against the garage wall, Early Girls were to the left of the gate.” This information will be the basis for a crop rotation plan. If you're not familiar with crop rotation, it's simply a way to avoid planting the same group of vegetables in the same location year after year.



The advantages to crop rotation are several. First, many soil insects and invertebrates prefer certain types of plants over others. If these pests do find your plants and their locations are never changed, the pest buildup will be quick and quite deadly for your plants. It is easier to control pests that are constantly in a search mode than in a let's make our city even bigger mode. Second, similarly to soil pests are soil diseases, whether these are fungal, viral, or bacterial. Many of these diseases can become quite difficult to control so avoiding a buildup of them in the first place should be a priority. Finally, crop rotating allows different plants to affect the soil in different ways. Some plants require a specific mineral or soil nutrient which naturally replenishes but slower than the plant takes away so a “rest” of that plant is best for the soil and ultimately the plant itself. Others add to the soil in ways that benefit other plants.

A fairly standard 4 crop rotation is legumes (peas, beans, etc.) followed by leafy veggies (lettuce, herbs, cabbage, spinach, etc.), followed by fruit (cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, eggplant, peppers, melons), followed by root plants (onions, turnips, carrots, garlic, beets, radishes). As an example, for a single plot in year 1 you plant tomatoes. Then in year 2 that's where your carrots and turnips would go, year 3 would be peas, and in year 4 lettuce and cabbage.

Easy to follow, good for individual plants' health, better for your garden's success, and if you don't plant one of the categories simply skip that step.

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