



How to design and plant a guild

Why plant in guilds?

When we grow a fruit tree in our garden it can benefit greatly from being grown in a good arrangement with a combination of well-chosen companion plants - that is, a guild. Guilds are great for planting on nature strips or in a backyard orchard.

In permaculture we try to copy nature by giving this beneficial arrangement a structure similar to that of a forest: we plant a taller tree as the canopy, and other plants to create the understorey and groundcover.

This arrangement is also called 'stacking'. It enables you to grow plants of different heights closely together, creating a favourable microclimate and possibly a structural frame for climbing plants. Just as above the ground the plants are not all the same height, so too in the soil the different deep and shallow root systems take nutrients from both the topsoil and deeper down, thus not competing with each other.

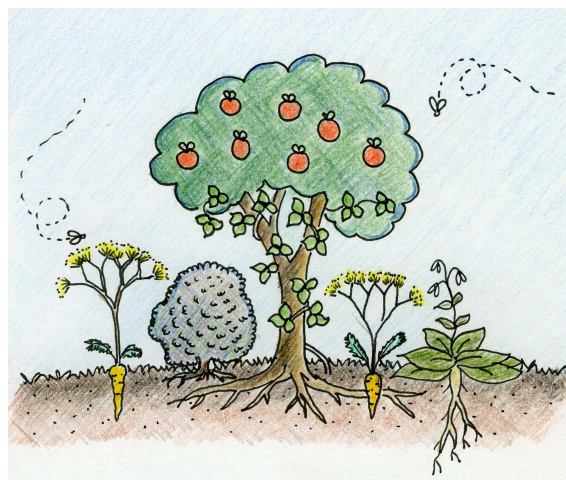
Designing your guild

1 Select a site that best suits the variety of fruit tree you want to grow. For example, does it need full sun, well-drained soils, protection from frosts or protection from damaging winds?

2 Choose the companion plants for your fruit tree, based on these three criteria for each.

- Is it a good companion? Will it help the fruit tree?
- Is it a good shape and size? Will it fit well with the tree? Remember, we need groundcovers, herbs and climbers.
- Does it like the same environment? Think about both plants' needs: their requirements for soil type, sunlight and water. Do they go well with the needs of the tree?

3 When you have chosen the companions, design and plant your guild, being mindful of the mature size and shape of each plant and the space and sunlight it will need.



What is a 'companion plant'?

A 'companion plant' is one that has a beneficial relationship with other plants around it and the soil.

What is a 'guild'?

A guild is a group of plants and animals that support and assist each other when grown together. A guild is usually based around one main plant, such as a fruit tree.

How does a guild work?

Central element (eg fruit tree): acts as support structure, provides bird habitat, produces edible fruit.

Climber: supported by fruit tree, provides additional yields, confuses pests.

Understorey herbs: pest control, culinary herbs, bee forage.

Groundcovers: living mulch, protect the soil, suppress weeds.

Legumes: enrich the soil.