

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

MAY 2025

Page One

Horticultural Column

Protect My Patch

By Harriet Wetstone

Because I have a woodland edge garden with not a lot of full sun, my little raised bed veggie patch is limited to herbs and brassicas. Parsley, oregano, basil and chives do fine, as does kale and broccoli and cabbage. Mostly I don't mind, because it's really the kale I love best, and I can usually feast on it well into November. But last year my vegetables were decimated by someone who made Swiss cheese out of every leaf. GRRR! So this year I am determined to protect my patch!

First off, I found an article entitled "Who is Eating My Kale." OMG, this one has my name on it. Poor kale, it has a host of enemies: cabbage worms, flea beetles, cabbage loopers, whiteflies, just to name a few. But cabbage worms! The disgusting photo (I will spare you) was a clear match to what my poor kale looked like last year. These fuzzy, very little, green caterpillars are the larvae of cabbage white butterflies, and they are voracious. What to do?



French Marigold

Floating row covers will keep the white butterflies from landing on your kale and laying their eggs. You can also spray it with Neem oil. The best row covers are made of polypropylene or polyester, because they allow rain and sunlight to pass through, and it's easy enough to buy by the yard. And neem oil? Neem oil is extracted from the seeds of the Neem Tree, and it acts as a useful plant insect repellent. It's nontoxic to humans and other wildlife, most importantly bees, wasps, ladybugs, and butterflies.

A prettier way to ward off predatory insects is to plant strong smelling plants amidst your vegetables. Mint, calendula, coriander, thyme, etc. are said to help deter insects, but I had them all and my kale was still lunch, but not for me. This year, however, I am going to plant lots of marigolds as well as using row covers and neem oil.

But not just any marigold. While they are all attractive, and some of them stunning, they are not all as useful as insect repellents. There are three types:

- the little, tiny signet marigolds (*tagetes tenuifolia*) which are said to be more aromatic but with smaller flowers;
- the French marigolds (*tagetes patula*) with small but more complex flowers and growing to two feet and said to be the best for repellent purposes;
- the African marigolds (*tagetes erecta*) which are gorgeous and will grow up to four feet tall.

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Page Two

And then, of course, there are many combinations of the three types.



French Marigolds

Marigolds range in color from pale yellow to orange to deep mahogany. There are tiny single marigolds and giant intensely ruffled ones, and I think they look even better in combinations than as groups of any one kind. Some bloom early summer, others later summer, and some all season. It's important to remember that they need to be in flower to be useful repellants. You don't want to notice caterpillar damage and then plant some marigolds. That would be way too late!!

Marigolds aren't fussy with regards to soil, but they do like full sun. They need to be watered very well when young, and not so often when mature. They don't like to be crowded. But above all, the more marigolds the better for repellent purposes!



French Marigolds

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