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Plant Partners: Creative Plant Associations For Perennials



Synopsis

Magical planting suggestions from today's most compelling garden writer. Herbaceous perennials are the star performers in the garden. But to create maximum impact they need the right partners, and knowing which plant to put with which is an art that often eludes even the most knowledgeable of gardeners. Here, Anna Pavord helps to solve this tantalizing problem by suggesting 60 plants that she feels deserve a place in every garden -- her star plants -- and to accompany them, two ideal partners. She shows, season by season, how to create irresistible planting associations that juxtapose texture, shape, color, and scent. In these small-scale recipes she uses perennials, annuals, and bulbs that either perform simultaneously or dovetail to provide interest for most of the year. To extend the options, she also gives scores of alternatives for each combination. Stunning photographs and Anna's unique ability to awaken us to the delights and idiosyncrasies of these, her favorite plants, work together to provide a marvelous source of planting ideas. These can be visited time and time again, whether we want merely to fill one small gap, transform an awkward corner, or start a whole new border from scratch.

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Customer Reviews

Anna Pavord has no patience for dwarf plants ("a perverse trend"), pastels ("Stop overdosing on pastels. We've had more than enough of them"), or winter gardens ("Who needs them? The pleasures of the winter garden are only for masochists"), not to mention all-white beds

("somnambulist gardening"). She has a sharp eye and a predilection for cheeky Briticisms, and she's not afraid to use either. *Plant Partners* is organized into seasons--the real growing seasons: signs of spring, spring turns to summer, high summer, and into autumn. Within these seasons Pavord presents 60 "star" plants that should be highlighted in the perennial bed. For each of her favorite plants she provides a supporting cast of two varieties--annuals, bulbs, or perennials--that partner particularly well with the stars, and under the same soil and light conditions. The groupings might be designed so that all of the flowers will be in bloom at once (pasqueflower with grape hyacinth and deep-purple primroses, for example), or so that when one flower's blooms are just starting to fade another's are waiting in the wings (lily-of-the-valley with a hellebore and barrenwort). A listing of "alternative" partners extends the range of choices to include more unusual plants and ones that might be more challenging to grow. Foliage is given as much consideration as blooms: "Darling! Salmon! How brave!" exclaim the white-garden brigade as they sharpen their pruning knives for a horticultural mercy killing. You might as well fall on your garden fork there and then as try to explain that the point of the *rodgersia* they are looking at is not the buff-pink flower but the whirls of bronze underneath it. But her exhortation to use foliage--as well as grasses and nonflowering perennials as "star" plants--to best advantage cannot be ignored in *Plant Partners*. Pavord's advice throughout is practical and opinionated. --Liana Fredley

Combining plants in the garden to achieve a pleasing effect of color and symmetry is an art form many gardeners try to emulate. For her take on the practice, Pavord (*The Tulip*) presents 60 outstanding perennials (as well as some bulbs and annuals) and two plants that will complement them in the garden. The perennials are arranged by the three growing seasons, and each is illustrated with a gorgeous close-up photograph. Pavord also provides general growing advice in addition to plants' growing dimensions, qualities, and varieties. A chapter at the end of the book lists alternatives for different site and soil conditions. Oddly, a shot of the plants with their "partners" is missing, though a few combination photos are provided in the introductory essay to each section. Though not as successful as Jeff Cox's excellent *Plant Marriages* (LJ 3/1/93), this will be a good addition to gardening collections in public libraries. Phillip Oliver, Univ. of North Alabama, Florence
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I can't believe no one has yet to review this book. I find myself going through the book to look up a particular plant combination and then spending at least an hour paging through the book all over again. Anna Pavord's humo(u)rful writing makes for an easy read. This book is a definite MUST

HAVE for anyone, beginner, amateur or professional (even if they wouldn't admit to having it on their shelf) who is interested in combining plants. I started using it about a year ago, and the results are fantastic - these combinations work. I especially like the attention to normally overlooked plants such as euphorbias, violets, and columbines and I am dying to try some of the more exotic combinations. The featured plant trios each contain a "star" plant and two companions. Each of the stars are also listed in the back with alternative partners. The book is organized with gradations from spring-summer-fall and includes bulbs as well as perennials and a few annuals. Missing are shrubs, roses, and climbers, but we can't have everything in one book, can we? The main critique I have (if possible I would have deducted 1/2 a star) is that the cultural information is decidedly limited - beginners will need to supplement this book with a good all-around perennial book. The pictures are drop-dead gorgeous and alternative colors and specific named varieties are also given. My advice - buy this book now and you can still get these plants in before spring really gets rolling.

'plant partners' by leading horticultural journalist, Anna Pavord, loudly proclaimed on the cover as the author of the best-selling 'The Tulip' is comparable to culinary journalist Michael Ruhlman's writing a mass market paperback (probably from Workman or Chronicle Books) on foods which go together. In both cases, the authors' success with 'high journalism' is no guarantee that their more pedestrian books will be worthy. Fortunately, like Ruhlman's 'Charcuterie', Anna Pavord's more popular efforts like this volume are a cut above the average oversized book crafted to do well on the bargain table. In fact, Ms. Pavord's book is so well accomplished, the average gardener may actually find it a bit dense. The first thing that stands out is the fact that not only does our scholarly Ms. Pavord use the formal Latin scientific names for all flowers (which I heartily endorse), she also uses these scientific names as the section headings. One has to go to the individual sections and look at the pictures of the flowers to be sure you know of what species she is talking. Now many Latin names have become familiar enough to a dedicated gardener that this may not be a big thing to a true amateur gardener. Even I recognize with no prompting the fact that 'Allium' is the name of the lily genus and that 'Hemerocallis' is the genus name for daylilies. Even easier are the genus names 'Hosta', 'Iris', and 'Phlox'. This still leaves a fairly large number of pretty arcane names for the average occasional gardener. My other major complaint about this book is that while the primary subject is the matter of pairing plants which go together well, there are very few pictures of the highlighted pairs, as they actually appear in the garden. There are wonderful pictures of many plants, but mostly they are 'head shots' which are about as artificial as a photographic portrait taken in a studio. Even with these two hurdles, this is a really worthy book, worth the effort needed to work

with these stylistic choices. The very best aspect of the book is that the pairings are organized by season, and within season, offering pairs of plants that come together into their best presentation garb, whether that be flowers or foliage. My second favorite thing about the book is that it does not limit itself to either annuals or perennials. It does not even limit itself to our most familiar plant phyla, as it includes several ferns, which are probably ignored by the average gardener. My third favorite aspect of the book is that in spite of the far ranging variety of plants, it still manages to hit upon a few of my favorites, some of which are actually in my garden at this very moment. It is no surprise that my favorite here is the Tulip cultivar, 'Princess Irene', of which I have planted hundreds. Unlike cooking, which one can (and must) do throughout the year, gardening has those lovely / dreadful lulls in the winter (especially in my Zone 5 and in the author's England), where all one has to fuel the gardening gene is the seed catalogues and books such as the one we have here. This is the kind of book you want to read through from cover to cover over the Christmas holidays with a notepad and pencil (or laptop) in hand, to record ideas for the coming spring. It will not yield much for the quick lookup. You will need to ponder this material and use it to fuel your imagination and keep that green thumb fertilized during the cold months. The book's value for this use is multiplied thrice over by the fact that Ms. Pavord knows how to write! She keeps you engaged while giving you a tour of fascinating possibilities for the coming growing season.

This book is very informative and a pleasure to read. The author is both knowledgeable and opinionated and even if one doesn't always agree with her, her humor is very funny; dry, understated, and British. Most of the plants she mentions are pictured somewhere in the book, and where the picture isn't on the same page as the description, the page number to locate the picture is in the margin right next to the written description. A great job and an excellent book!

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