

# The 5<sup>th</sup> C: Crop and Animal Diversity

**Diversity is nature's secret weapon.**

If you have a lot of different types of plants above ground, you will end up with a greater diversity of friendly critters, both above and below ground. Different plants tend to attract and nurture different types of critters – almost all of them good for your soil and your plants. Why is diversity so important? Here are two important reasons:

**First, you want your workforce of helpful critters to include lots of “specialists”.** These are critters that are really, really good at specific tasks, such as pollinating your plants (above ground) and protecting them from certain diseases (below ground). The more different types of critters you have in your soil and in your yard, the more likely it will be that your plant can find the help it needs to set fruit on time or to fight off diseases and pests.

**Second, you want your workforce to be “resilient”.** That means it includes critters that do many of the same good things, but under different conditions. One group might work at high temperatures but go to sleep at lower temperatures. Others will prefer dry conditions, some will like wet conditions. If you have good diversity, there will always be the right critter available for the right set of conditions. That way, both your above ground and below ground workforces are producing great results for you and your plants no matter what the weather brings.

Below are some tips for increasing and maintaining high levels of diversity:

- **Rotate your plantings of annuals.** Rotating your plants breaks up the disease cycle and also brings new types of critters to the area each year, keeping diversity levels high.
- **Use compost.** Well-made, mature compost is full of all sorts of helpful critters. In fact, supporting diversity is perhaps compost's greatest strength. Adding it yearly refreshes the pool of “experts” in your soil, so that your plants have a deep pool of potential partners to draw on whenever the need arises.
- **Have some perennials in your garden.** Perennials feed soil critters all year long, even in winter, which helps to maintain diversity and overall soil health.
- **Use native species.** Native plant species will naturally encourage the development of a community of critters, both above and below ground, that is both diverse and well suited for your lawn and garden environment.
- **Have pollinator-friendly plants in your mix.** They will add to the overall health of your lawn and garden ecosystem, plus add their own underground workforce specialists to the mix.



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## ... one of the 6Cs for Healthy Soil