

## Find Your Marigold



**Welcome to your first year of fill in the blank.** This year will test you more intensely than just about anything you've done up to now. It will deplete all your energy, bring you to tears, and make you question every talent or skill you thought you had. But all these tests, if you approach them the right way, will leave you better and stronger than you are today. Advice is available everywhere you look, and some of it is very good. Still, with everything you have to do right now, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of it all. And the fact is, a lot of those tips won't work very well if you fail to follow this one essential rule: ***Surround yourself with good people.*** By finding the positive, supportive, energetic people in your school and sticking close to them, you can improve your satisfaction more than with any other strategy. And your chances of excelling in this life will skyrocket. Just like a young seedling growing in a garden, thriving in your

first year depends largely on who you plant yourself next to.

## The Marigold Effect

Many experienced gardeners follow a concept called *companion planting*: placing certain vegetables and plants near each other to improve growth for one or both plants. For example, rose growers plant garlic near their roses because it repels bugs and prevents fungal diseases. Among companion plants, the marigold is one of the best: It protects a wide variety of plants from pests and harmful weeds. If you plant a marigold beside most any garden vegetable, that vegetable will grow big and strong and healthy, protected and encouraged by its marigold.

Marigolds exist in our schools as well – encouraging, supporting, and nurturing growing individuals on their way to maturity. If you can find at least one marigold in your school and stay close to them, you will grow. Find more than one and you will positively thrive.

Few people will be lucky enough to be planted close to a marigold – being assigned to work with one in a group, team, or partner will be rare. You will have to seek them out. You can identify them by the way they congratulate you on arrival, rather than asking why anyone would want to be in this godforsaken place. Or by the way their offers to help sound sincere. Or just by how you feel when you're with them: Are you calmer, more hopeful? Excited to get started on a task? Comfortable asking questions, even the stupid ones? If you feel good around this person, chances are they have some marigold qualities.

Once you've identified your marigolds, make an effort to spend time with them. Having a hard day? Go to your marigolds. Not understanding a concept? Go to your marigolds. Confused by something the teacher said in class? Marigolds. They may be on the other side of the building, out of your grade or class, or otherwise less convenient to reach than others. If your school is especially toxic, you might have to find your marigolds in another school, or even online. Make the effort. It's worth the trouble.

## Beware the Walnut Trees

While seeking out your marigolds, you'll need to take note of the walnut trees. Successful gardeners avoid planting vegetables anywhere near walnut trees, which give off a toxic substance that can inhibit growth, wilt, and ultimately kill nearby vegetable plants. And sadly, if your school is like most, walnut trees will be abundant. They may not seem dangerous at first. In fact, some may appear to be good students – happy, social, well-organized. But here are some signs that you should keep your distance: Their take on other kids is negative. Their take on the school is negative. Being around them makes you feel insecure, discouraged, overwhelmed, or embarrassed.

WALNUT TREES ARE POISON. Avoid them whenever you can. If you don't, they will start to infect you, and soon you'll hate school, or this class, or a job, or even life as much as they do.

Doing this may be a challenge: Your best friend might be a walnut tree. You may be sitting next to one. You might work on a whole team of walnut trees, spending hours with them every week. Touching base with your marigolds will help flush out the toxins that build up from contact with the walnut trees. On top of that, simply identifying certain people as walnut trees can help dilute their power over you. If I'd had a label I could mentally place on certain people in the schools where I was, they would have had far less of an impact on me.

So in the spirit of identification, here are some common walnut tree varieties to look out for:

## Get What You Can, Where You Can

Your search for marigolds will yield imperfect results: Not everyone is all-marigold or all-walnut tree. There will be some in the building who just make you happy – go to them for a mood boost. Some who aren't terribly good at the subject for the class, but love learning and challenge – seek them out when you need to be reminded of how important learning is too. Others will take care of you – encourage you to rest, slack off a little, not beat yourself up. And some who are intensely into the subject or class, who always have a great strategy on hand and keep up on current assignments – they can really help you stretch your abilities. Learn who has what marigold qualities and get what you can from each of them.

Finally, try to find some compassion for the walnut trees. Their toxicity comes from a place of real pain, and they themselves probably fell under the influence of the walnut trees who came before them. Plus, it's not like their complaints have no basis in reality.