

Biodynamic Gardening

I understand 'Biodynamic' to mean harnessing the natural energies, rhythms and cycles inherent in nature and earth systems to aid success in our gardening and horticultural activities. It is sometimes called the 'science of life-forces' and has many followers. Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher and educationalist, promoted his work on biodynamics in the context of permaculture and sustainable approaches to living on the earth back in the 1920s.

Underpinning principles:

Earthly and universal systems interact and affect each other – gravity, sun spot cycles, eclipses etc. The earth is a dynamic living organism that is in relation to everything living on it (Gaia consciousness, dowsing, earth energies, aboriginal and first tribe belief systems). The universe (planets, moon and sun) affects what happens on the earth. Natural, organic approaches will solve most horticultural / gardening 'problems' (e.g. poor yield, poor soil, poor germination, poor animal health, pest infestation etc...)



A significant component of biodynamic gardening is to plough, prepare, sow, plant, harvest and compost according to the phases of the moon and the constellations (signs) it passes through.

Basically, there are two cycles to be aware of:

Monthly cycle 1 – moon travelling through the zodiac

| When the moon is travelling through: | Plant, Sow or Harvest... |
|--|----------------------------|
| FIRE signs (Aries, Leo and Sagittarius) | FRUIT-bearing crops |
| EARTH signs (Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn) | ROOT crops |
| AIR signs (Gemini, Libra and Aquarius) | FLOWER crops |
| WATER signs (Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces) | LEAF crops |

Monthly Cycle 2 – Phases of the Moon

The moon travels in an elliptical orbit around the earth which means that the gravitational effects on the earth are not constant. This force affects sap movement, root and foliage growth.

| Phase of the moon: | Activity: |
|----------------------------|---|
| Moonrise | Best time of the day to sow / plant |
| New Moon | Pick fruits for storing (fruits = Fire signs) |
| 1 st Quarter | Sow seeds |
| 2 nd Quarter | Roots rest, foliage grows |
| Full Moon | No sowing or planting |
| Third Quarter | Roots strengthen, foliage slows |
| Fourth Quarter | Prune now – roots and foliage rest |
| North Node (Dragon's Head) | No sowing or planting (moon's path crossing earth's path) |
| South Node (Dragon's Tail) | No sowing or planting (moon's path crossing earth's path) |
| Eclipses | No sowing or planting |

Biodynamic practitioners also take great care in the composition of the soil, composting practices, animal husbandry and position and aspect of the garden.

Working with **Nick Kollerstrom's** book, 'Gardening and Planting by the Moon', I carried out a simple experiment in 2008 by growing seed from the same packet of tomatoes at two different times of the moon (one at the 'correct' time and one at the 'worst' time). I noticed that germination and early growth was more rapid and healthier on the seeds sown at the correct time, despite their being sown 6 days after the seeds sown at the wrong time.

On picking, the taste test was mixed. I felt that the tomatoes from the group sown at the correct time tasted sweeter. A second opinion felt that the other group tasted better. This year, I am growing different types of seed: Melon, Basil, Sweetpea.



Useful links: www.biodynamic.org.uk; www.gardenorganic.org.uk; www.lunarorganics.com