



## Biodynamic Farming: About Preparations, Becoming Biodynamic

**Read more about how biodynamic farming proponents, like most farmers, believe that our interconnectedness with nature plays a major role in how it functions.**

(From "Biodynamic Farming," by Jessica Walliser, page 2 of 2)

Biodynamic Preparations cont.

Many Biodynamic farmers make the preparations on their farm with herbs and other ingredients harvested "in-house." Others turn to regional or local groups who come together each season to make the preparations.

When this isn't possible or the supply doesn't last through the season, some farmers purchase the preparations from an outside source.

The Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics of Woolwine, Va., supplies Biodynamic growers with properly made preparations and serves to educate farmers on their creation.

For many, the use of Biodynamic preparations can be a little hard to grasp; these are often the details that require an open mind. But several studies have shown why these preparations work, to speed compost production and improve crop health.

The field preparations contain cytokinins—natural plant hormones known to stimulate plant growth—and the composting preparations work as a catalyst to speed up the composting process.

Research at Washington State University found that Biodynamic compost has higher temperatures, a faster maturation rate and higher nitrates than control piles. The same researchers found that the soil on Biodynamic farms has higher soil-microorganism activity and more diverse soil life.

"The preparations, in particular, bring a vitality to the soil, the food and the animals that is measurable on some level, but they're not something that most farmers will talk about from an analytical point of view.

"Vitality is often something people feel on the inside or observe with their eyes. On a well-planned and vibrant Biodynamic farm, there's a sense of orderliness and often an intangible quality that's somehow evident, even to people without any kind of training," says Forsell.

"The Biodynamic preparations, which stem from a whole other level of thinking, challenge the farmer to see the farm from more than a physical perspective. Biodynamic farming integrates dimensions that exist outside or beside the more understood physical level."

### Cosmic Forces at Work

Biodynamic farmers also incorporate celestial cycles into their growing practices. Believing that our Earth's rhythms are influenced by more than just the sun and moon, Biodynamic growers feel that plant growth and soil health are connected with many planetary influences and work to invite the pulses of the universe onto the farm.

For example, the pulverized quartz crystals used in preparation number 501 are applied to plants not only to stimulate plant growth but also to establish a relationship between the crops and various cosmic forces.

Many of the farmers' actions, including cultivating, planting, creating the preparations and harvesting, are timed according to moon phases and other cosmic elements.

Most Biodynamic farmers use calendars developed to assist them in calculating the optimum time for these activities.

Hometown weather patterns and personal preferences are also factored in to personalize planning for each farm.

These patterns help Biodynamic farmers determine which crops are best planted on which days according to where the moon is in relation to the constellations.



There are several different calendars available to growers.

The Biodynamic Sowing and Planting Calendar is published in 18 languages and is the oldest Biodynamic planting guide; Stella Natura Biodynamic Planting Calendar contains essays from Biodynamic practitioners in addition to planting charts; and the Northern Hemisphere Astro Calendar is beautifully illustrated. All are available from various online sources and the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association.

#### Becoming Biodynamic

Anyone is welcome to integrate Biodynamic techniques into their farm or garden; a very passionate and convivial community awaits, ready and willing to share their knowledge and provide advice (or an ear) whenever necessary.

“The concepts and activities remain the same whether you are a 1/16 of an acre garden or a 1,000-acre farm. The farm or garden organism is the framework, and the goal in fostering all of these techniques is a more ecologically integrated landscape,” says Forsell.

If you're interested in labeling or marketing your farm or its products as Biodynamic, you'll need to get certified by the Demeter Association. The process takes a minimum of three years without an existing USDA organic certification and about two years if that certification is already in place.

“The basic certification process is not unlike that of organic certification. A system plan is submitted, and the plan goes through multiple steps of review, inspection on-site and decision making. Demeter certification uses the requirements of the NOP as a base requirement to Biodynamic certification,” says Fullmer.

“The organic certification prohibits the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, but our standards go much further and include a biodiversity set aside of 10 percent of total land, on-farm fertility and pest control; rigorous processing standards that emphasize minimal product manipulation, and also whole-farm certification (versus a particular crop or area as allowed in organic certification). The standards for a Demeter Certified Biodynamic farm are quite rigorous.”

To many, Biodynamic farming is the purest example of sustainability. Schneider reminds that farming is the only activity where everything needed to sustain it is created within its own boundaries.

He's afraid that too often when people learn about Biodynamic farming, they glean odd details like cow horns and moon phases and forget that it's really about making agriculture the foundation of the economic and social fabric of our communities.

Farmers, he says, are really primary health-care practitioners and need to be trained and valued as such: “Just like medical doctors, they are tasked to care for very complicated and involved organisms.” No farmer is going to argue with that.

#### Brush up on Biodynamics

If your appetite has been whet for more information about Biodynamic farming, visit any of the organizations mentioned above online, as well as National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, and check out these books: Gardening for Life - The Biodynamic Way: A Practical Introduction to a New Art of Gardening, Sowing, Planting, Harvesting, by Maria Thun (Hawthorn Press, 2000) Agriculture Course: The Birth of the Biodynamic Method, by Rudolf Steiner (Rudolf Steiner Press, paperback 2004) A Biodynamic Farm, by Hugh Lovel (Acres U.S.A., 2000) Principals of Biodynamic Spray and Compost Preparations, by Manfred Klett (Floris Books, 2006; 2nd edition) Secrets of the Soil: New Solutions for Restoring Our Planet, by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (Earthpulse Press, 1998)

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