



## Mother Nature's Planting Guide - continued

**Take some cues from nature—even the zodiac--and discover what agriculturalists knew about the affect of the moon and the planets centuries ago.**

Mother Nature's Planting Guide continued:

### Looking Up

Too often, we keep our eyes to the ground and miss an entire realm above our heads. As gardeners, it might do us good to start paying attention to the patterns above us to get that extra edge in the dirt.

### What's Your Sign?

Find out what influence each sign of the zodiac has on plant growth. [Click here](#)>

### More Helpful Lists

Check out our free downloads. Or grab one of our seasonal planting checklists. When looking to the heavens for cues, pay attention to two factors: lunar phases and the placement of the moon within the astrological signs. You don't have to be a professional astronomer to determine the best time to plant, thanks to those who've studied the skies in depth before us.

In reality, increased germination during the proper lunar cycle makes sense, because the Earth and moon both have tremendous gravitational forces that play against each other.

As sure as the moon cycles affect the tides of the ocean, they impact what happens inside the tiniest seed.

The same is true of the moisture in the soil; as water is pulled closer to the surface during certain times of the month, it provides the plants with what they need and promotes growth.

For example, the ideal time for planting seeds is just before or during the new moon, when the moon's gravitational pull is at its greatest, drawing up moisture and allowing the seeds to absorb the moisture and germinate.

In the second quarter, where the moonlight is brighter but the gravitational pull is less, the most vigorous leaf growth occurs.

Activity under the soil is at its climax just past the peak of the full moon. As the light begins to wane, leaf growth decreases, but the roots are stimulated by an increased pull from the Earth due to the declining force of the moon.

This is the time to plant carrots, potatoes, bulbs and other root crops. It's also a good opportunity to transplant, encouraging the seedlings to take hold quickly by developing strong roots.

The fourth quarter of the moon is a time of rest. The moon is dark; both leaf and root growth are retarded.

Take advantage of this lull to inhibit weed regrowth, or take care of other tasks best performed when not dealing with vigorous growth, such as pruning, because there's less sap in the stems of the plant.

This fourth-quarter period is probably the moon phase when my father and his friend should have completed their brush-clearing project, and I'll take this into consideration when I clear an area for my new garden bed.

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### Factoring in the Planets

To complicate matters, the moon passes through the astrological signs every few days, and many believe the characters of the zodiac are associated with the four elements—water, air, earth and fire—that affect plant growth.

According to this tradition, certain plants prefer certain signs. For instance, root vegetables do best when the moon is in Taurus, Virgo or Capricorn, while crops grown for their fruit or seed prefer Leo, Sagittarius and Aries.

Attributes of each sign dictate what plants respond to their influence.



Some phases, such as the moon in Leo, are notoriously barren and dry, suited for anything but planting. Others practically guarantee lush growth. The moon in Scorpio, a watery and feminine sign, is one of the most productive periods to plant sturdy plants and vines. It's also recommended to transplant tomatoes. (See "What's Your Sign" for more on the zodiac.)

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#### Evidence That It Works

Thankfully, we don't have to calculate all of these factors ourselves. The Farmers' Almanac, as well as a number of other calendars and publications, create annual charts based on the celestial schedule.

Looking back at my own trials, I see my first basil was planted on March 8, a day after the new moon and in the sign of Pisces, which is a highly fruitful, moist sign and one of the best for planting seeds. No wonder the basil germinated in less than four days.

My second planting was on March 10 under the sign of Aries, a barren and dry sign. The greatest difference was slower germination—five days instead of four—and a few less plants. Not exactly Earth-shattering results, but significant enough to take notice.

Of course, my simple trials were less than strictly scientific, but a number of critical thinkers have tested the theories in a wide variety of studies. During the 1930s, German scientists Eugen and Lily Kolisko followed Rudolf Steiner's (the presumed father of biodynamic gardening) path by testing the theory of planting by the moon phases on root vegetables. They found encouraging results.

In the 1950s, Maria Thun, another German scientist, performed extensive experiments on radishes, testing her theory of the four elements being influenced by the moon's placement in the zodiac.

She developed a rather complicated breakdown of percentages of influence for each type of plant and created the biodynamic sowing and planting calendar that's used today.

Since then, many others have built upon these theories, testing various sowing schedules for everything from peas to potatoes. Some conclude it works, others haven't yielded clear results, but few work to negate the positive experiments.

Gardeners, though, don't require absolute proof before they'll try something. Despite varied success in scientific trials, gardening by celestial influence has been around since farming took hold, and it's gaining popularity once again as people take notice of other factors that might come into play.

Undoubtedly, most fruits and vegetables will still grow without paying strict attention to lunar phases and the position of the stars, but using the Almanac's best days as guides might make things easier.

At the end of my gardening season and my informal trial, all of the tomatoes and basil did equally well. I didn't notice a difference in overall harvest, but I plan to do it again next year. It doesn't hurt anything, and even if it means only a few extra plants, all the better.

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About the Author: Amy Grisak is a freelance writer and avid gardener in Great Falls, Mont., who will resort to just about anything to make her growing experiments succeed.

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