

Biodynamic Gardening: A Deeper Approach to Sustainable Living

By Nannette Chisholm

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As a gardener with the Estes Park Community Garden for the past several years, I have always appreciated that our gardens are fully organic, giving us the opportunity to bring high quality food to our tables while respecting our precious environment.

However, there is another method of sustainable farming and gardening that takes organic practices a step further, called Biodynamic Farming. Biodynamic Farming aligns with the organic farming standards of eliminating chemical fertilizer and pesticides and using sustainable techniques to build soils and plant health. However, it goes a step further to include practices that honor the unseen forces of nature that affect soil and plant health, thereby creating a deeper ecological balance on the farm.

Biodynamic methods originated in Europe in 1924, when farmers began noticing a marked decline in their crop and animal health due to the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. An Austrian scientist and philosopher named Rudolph Steiner proposed a method of farming that would treat the entire farm as a self-contained biological organism. In looking at the relationships between the animals, crops, soil, farmer and the forces of nature, Steiner proposed that farms using biodynamic techniques would produce much healthier crops while building vibrant, mineral rich soils for generations to come.

The word Biodynamic was coined by combining the words biological and dynamic. The biological practices of the farm align with all the common organic farming techniques such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and using natural fertilizers and pesticides, among others. The dynamic practices, however, are what begin to differentiate biodynamic farming from organic farming. These practices take into account the natural forces that affect plant growth and development, such as planting certain crops according to the lunar phases and making special preparations that add microbial, mineral and homeopathic herbal treatments back to the compost, soil and plants. There are 9 specific preparations that are made and used on a biodynamic farm, much like the homeopathic medicines humans might use to boost their health. Herbs such as yarrow, chamomile, and valerian are the basis for some, while ingredients such as quartz, cow manure, and oak bark provide the basis for others.

How is all of this relevant to us as backyard or community gardeners? If you want to dive more deeply into making your backyard garden a sustainable ecology, you might consider planting and harvesting during the optimal moon phases, or using techniques such as companion planting and crop rotation to discourage garden pests and increase soil health. You can also find local biodynamic farms to buy your plant starts and heirloom seeds from in the spring.

On the Front Range, we have a few local options. I have bought many of my plant starts from Aspen Moon Farm, a Certified Biodynamic Farm in Hygiene, CO., and these plants have proven to be extremely healthy and robust. I love how vital the plants are, and I appreciate using heirloom seeds that are saved locally. I also like supporting biodynamic farms because this approach matches my own

philosophical and spiritual beliefs about how we as humans can not only rely on the land to feed us, but we can be true stewards in the process.

Nannette Chisholm has been a Reiki Master and Shamanic Energy Medicine Practitioner for the past 18 years in Estes Park. She earned her Master of Science Degree in Sustainable Systems Design in 1991, and approaches all her life's interests with a deep reverence for humanity, nature and bringing balance to the whole.