

# Biodynamics In A Nutshell...

## The Sowing Calendar

### Key concept

Being aware of the natural and celestial rhythms can help support an easier and more natural way of growing. Using the moon to plant, weed or harvest vegetables, can help enhance the growth vitality and quality of the plant.

### In a nutshell...

One of the characteristics of Biodynamic (BD) practices is the use of the sowing calendar. When I meet people and have to explain Biodynamic agriculture while 'standing on one leg', I say to them that one of the external manifestations of BD is sowing by the phases of the moon. The other one is the use of the BD preparations. In this article I will give an insight into the basis of the former practice. There is a separate article on BD preparations.

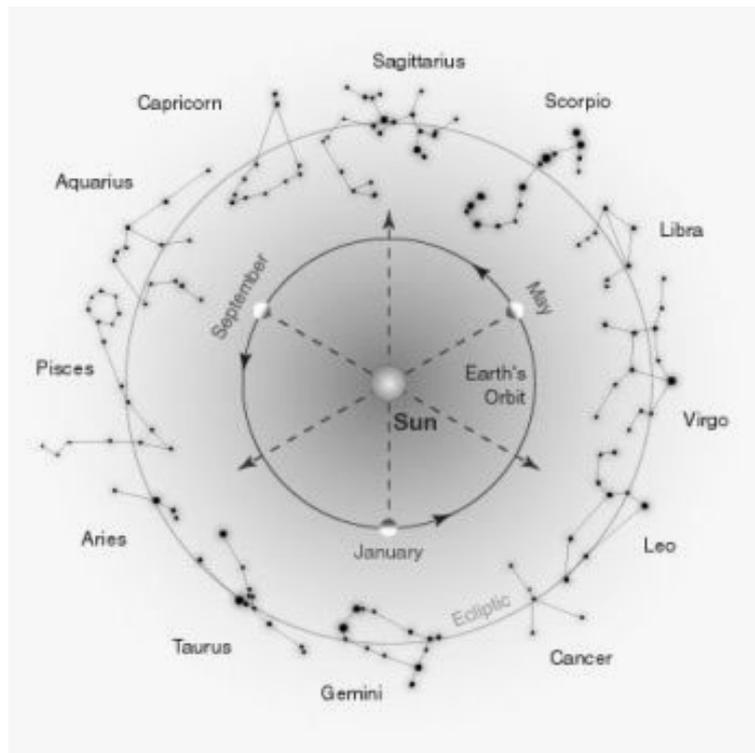
During the year we can observe several rhythms in the natural world: The yearly rhythm, the monthly rhythm and the daily rhythm.

### The yearly cycle

This is expressed in the seasons. During spring time the earth springs out in blossom and greenery, summer time is a time of flowering and fruiting, and ripening and colour change is a sign of autumn. Winter is a quiet time in nature. One can say that nature has retreated and is asleep. The biodynamic view is that the forces of nature have retreated to below ground.

There are many ways to depict this cycle, tree surgeons will talk about the rising and falling of the sap. They know that the best time to cut trees is in the winter when the sap is low. At that time wood is lighter and the tree responds best to the pruning (probably not so much to being completely cut down).

Another aspect which is felt less, though still noticed, is the movement of the sun in the sky. In the summer the sun is high and days are long while in the winter it is low and days are short. During the year the sun goes around the zodiac wheel once. During the course of a year the sun 'visits' every star sign once.



### **The monthly rhythm**

This is expressed through the waning and waxing moon. This is a result of the relationship between the moon, the sun and the earth. The moon is also travelling in the same path as the sun does but it is doing it in 29.5 days instead of in a year. The moon 'visits' every star sign (constellation) in a course of a lunar month. In nature the influences of the phases of the moon are subtle but we can observe them in the tides. Woodland workers will prefer to extract wood when the moon is waning. In this period the sap is lower.

### **The daily rhythm**

This is expressed in the rising and setting sun. Here, the difference in nature between morning and afternoon is probably best felt in the gardener's realm. The morning dew is fresh and it is the best time to harvest salads. When harvested in this way they remain fresh for longer. It can be said that the sap is higher in the morning and the leaves are full of it so when they are cut they remain fresh for longer.

### **The Breath of the Earth**

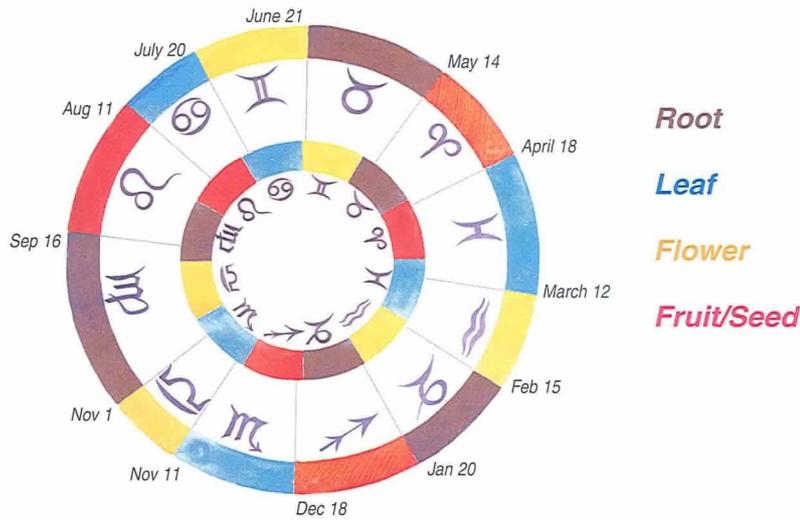
These cycles mirror each other but in different time scales. In Biodynamic it is said that the earth exhales at times (morning, waxing moon and spring) and inhales during other times (afternoon, waning and autumn).

Being aware of these movements give the gardener or farmer an opportunity to make the right choices to do certain task with nature: like harvesting or planting. For example as I said before the best time to harvest salad is in the morning when we there is a 'high sap' experience. Following that thought, in the afternoon it will be the best time to harvest roots. These rhythms have been known and used for many centuries and are still being used today in farming.

## Sowing by the moon phases

Now, I would like to look at what it means to sow by the phases of the moon. Firstly, we need to acknowledge that the moon is a great reflector it reflects the sunrays back to the earth. Secondly, as I described before, the moon travels through all the constellations every month. Every constellation is related to an element (earth, water, air and fire). For example Ram (Aries) is an earth sign. I was born in the sign of twins (Gemini) so I am in an air sign.

In Biodynamic practices the plant is observed as having four regions: root, leaf and stem, flower, and fruit. These four regions relate to the four elements: the root grows in the **earth**, the leaf and stem transports the liquid (**water**), the blossom is light and scented (**air**) and the fruit and seed is a concentration of the seasons work (**fire/warmth**).



Note: The difference between star signs and constellations is that the constellation relates to the actual group of stars in the sky which represent the bull, waterman, the ram etc... This is the Astronomical view. Astrology on the other hand divides the sky to 12 equal sections and these are the star signs. The picture above illustrates the differences the outer circle is the astronomical view of constellations and the inner circle represents the astrological view.

The sowing calendar is based on the way that as the moon travels around the zodiac it reflects the qualities of each star sign on to the earth and these qualities are at that times enhanced. For example, when I am growing beetroot. Being a root crop, I would like to enhance the earth qualities of the plant therefore I will sow, weed and harvest at the time when the moon is at an earth sign. If I include all the rhythms which are described above I will harvest my beetroot in the afternoon on that day.

The sowing calendar has been published by Maria Thun and her son Matthias for many years. The calendar describes the position of the moon and other planets for every time of the year and notes the best times for the different elements. From a practical point of view the calendar is looked at as a recommendation. Each farmer has to judge what is practical of him or her to do.

## About the author

Nir Halfon is one of the course leaders at the Biodynamic training at the Rachel Carson Centre. He has studied Anthroposophy in Israel and Biodynamics at Emerson College. Nir has completed an Msc in Energy and Environmental studies. Previously, he has taught gardening and sustainable development in schools and workshops on permaculture, gardening and biodynamics more broadly. His main interest is in the issues of sustainable farming and food production.