

Terra Símpatico

I have been gardening in Santa Fe since the early 80's. During the many years of cultivating the local soils, have come to learn and understand some of its composition, geology and ecology. Given the climate and topography of our region - from high mountains to steppe to river basin - we can expect seasonal extremes of cold, wind, heat/drought. Even around the greater Santa Fe area - location will reveal several types of soil - from the very alkaline caliche to alluvial sentiments.

Essential elements to ensure sustaining reserves of vitality in our soils are:

1. Managing and conserving water
2. Land contouring - slopes; embankments with stone; raised beds
3. Strengthen and renew life forces in the humus depleted soils, while balancing its alkalinity
4. Supporting biological activity including mycorrhizal input
5. Improving absorption capacity of nutrients in the soil for use by plant material
6. Holding moisture and insuring good drainage

Lauren Ogden in Plant Driven Design (2008) - reminds that the native vegetation can provide clues to the chemistry of the earth below and that no plant can be truly at home in a garden - if its needs are at odds with the indigenous soil.

“Plants are utterly open to and formed by the influences from the depths of the earth to the heights of the heavens. Permeated by celestial rhythms, while responding to light and warmth, water and earth/soil, the plant grows. The Biodynamic approach relates the ecology of the earth-organism to

that of the entire cosmos.” (Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association).

Integral to Biodynamic methods is building a soil/plant partnership that is dynamic and self-regulating - ie. plant growth in direct proportion to the vitality in the soil to actively decompose organic materials. The focus of our cultivation practice, aims toward improving the receptive capacity of the soil - its inner aliveness - its inner mobility. These practices are enhanced by the quality of balanced life forces found in Biodynamic compost. Reference to these life forces are reflected in the name, originating from the Greek as, bio-life and dynamis-energy.

This agricultural and gardening practice was derived from a series of lectures that Rudolf Steiner presented to gardeners, farmers and veterinarians in June 1924 in Koberwitz, Silesia, which is now part of Poland. Biodynamic concepts were brought to the US by Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer in the 1930's, while the Biodynamic Farming & Gardening Association was founded in 1938. Dr. Pfeiffer developed a testing method called Chromatography. In 1995, Sherry Wildfeur, editor for the BD calendar *Stella Natura*, describes the testing method as “actually making the life forces, which are otherwise rather ineffable - visible through the pictures formed when juices (from a BD compost sample) are dissolved in a solution of sodium hydroxide and allowed to rise up on simple filter paper that has been soaked in a solution of silver nitrate.”

Biodynamic compost is built in layers, utilizing dry-green matter, manures, garden soil or similar, past compost, water and six compost preparations. Five preps are inserted into the body of the pile, while valerian is sprayed over the pile after it is built. The preparations are specially made plant derived substances - which radiate energies through the pile. They assist

in organizing, balancing and optimizing aerobic fermentation in the breakdown process. Penetrating the pile in about three weeks, they serve as catalysts, directing the decomposition and buildup of materials in the pile, while bringing about a speedy and even breakdown that is more thoroughly digested. Steiner designated yarrow, chamomile, stinging nettle, valerian, dandelion and oak bark, as members of the plant kingdom which hold particular element (s) in the best possible form and/or ratio for use by the soil. Further, they act like a magnet for the celestial forces to enter an organic earthly activity. In the garden we can discover..."A tablespoon of good topsoil will have billions of micro organisms, all in varying states of growth, death and reproduction. Humus is, more or less, the persistent residue of this biological activity - a nutrient rich soil component. Although a tiny fraction of soil by weight, the presence, condition and activity of this humus is very effective in enlivening, stimulating and re-awakening the life forces in the Earth, soil and plants. " (From article in 2005 Stella Natura Biodynamic Calendar by Mason Vollmer).

"As farmers, we are rooted in the reality of place. Everything we do depends upon how we replenish and foster the six inches of fragile, living topsoil under our feet. So too for our fellow workers, the people we feed, the markets we serve and ultimately the viability of the farm." (Stephanie and Chris Tebbutt, Filgreen Farms in Mendocino, California)

In the January 2011 issue of Architectural Digest (www.architecturaldigest.com) the article 'Tuscan Paradise', displays the gardens and Biodynamic vineyards of Sting and Trudie Styler's 900 acre estate outside Florence, Italy. In 2007, International Biodynamic consultant Alan York, initiated Biodynamic practices at the Benzinger Winery in Sonoma, California - also developed the Styler vineyards.

Hugh Courtney of Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics had been creating the preparations since 1982. He describes the dynamic rather than the physical properties of the preps. "With BD agriculture and preps, we are asked to think in terms of carrier of forces, rather than substances. Just as the effects of the forces of magnetism or gravity can be observed without actually being able to see these forces, so to we can recognize through their effects, the forces which are released through the use of BD preps." Flower fragrances are heightened, their colors radiant richer hues or more subtle nuances. Terrior, the taste of the land, lends signature authenticity to the especially delicious flavor and premium quality of foods and beverages. Crops and livestock are healthier exhibiting greater disease resistance. "As the topsoil becomes deeper, it is less subject to erosion and the living substance is improved. The humus in the compost becomes colloidal and the micro-organisms ordinarily working to decompose materials, rather continues assisting in building stable humus and maintaining soil fertility. Plant roots and fine root hairs penetrate further and digest the humus - plants are stronger and thrive." (from phone interview with Hugh Courtney, July 2005).

Gaia-Sophia, the indwelling spirit of our Earth, is a self-organizing and self-regulating intelligence - perceptive and sentient, animating and responsive. We can trust Her to teach us what we need to know - for there is a reciprocal and rejuvenating connection bonding human nature to Gaian nurture. Let us garden Gaia with loving care. Please contact Maggie Lee at Terra Flora for information regarding prices and delivery... (505) 982-6879. I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Hugh Courtney and Alan York, both of whom have transitioned from the earth, for all the innumerable gifts of knowledge and experience they have shared with me. I also wish to acknowledge Bob Pennington of Agua Fria Nursery for his guidance regarding local soils and so much more.

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