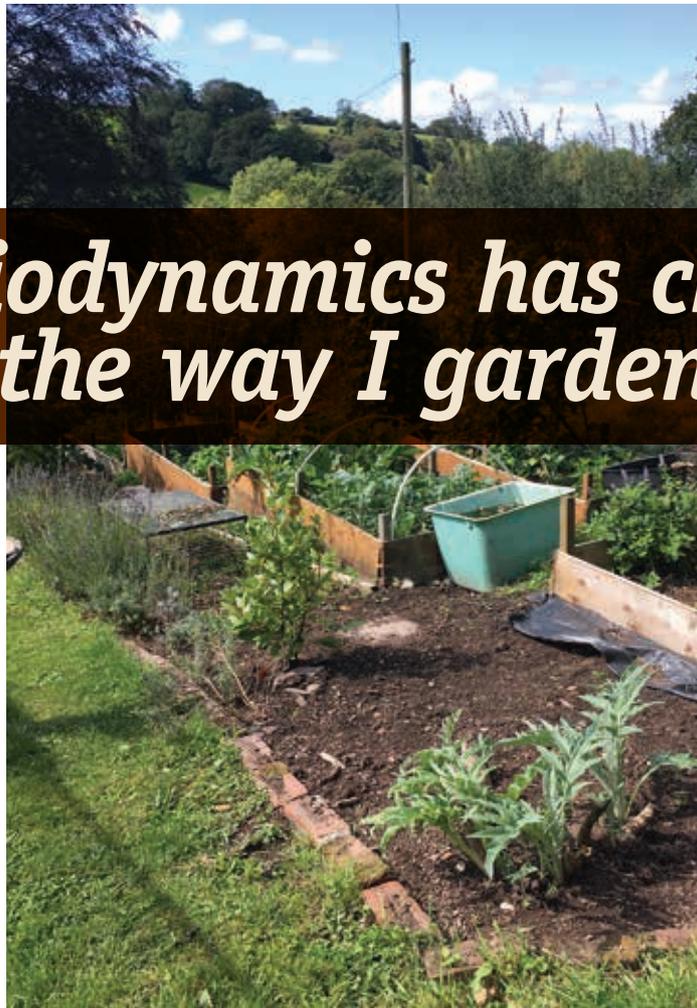


How biodynamics has changed the way I garden

THE END OF SUMMER and the start of autumn are a good time to reflect on the garden, what worked and plan for the future. Not that sowing stops; by the end of September I will have sown broad bean 'Aquadulce' which is good to overwinter. I have done this for many years, but am still amazed at how they survive frost, snow and cold temperatures remarkably unscathed.

It means that we get a crop a few weeks earlier than a spring sowing. In the spring I sow another variety 'Witkiem' in any gaps that have occurred over winter, plus a few extra rows. I always sow in rows, I have tried more scattered sowing, but rows work for me as I intercrop some with vegetables. Two of those are onions and garlic. Despite the failure of the garlic this year due to disease, I will try again in a raised bed as far away as possible from this year's and will then interplant the onions and garlic with rows of carrot seeds in the spring. I was told many years ago that this kept away carrot fly, and it works for me.

The winter is a good time to browse seed catalogues. I buy most of my vegetable and herb seeds from the Seed Co-op who produce open-pollinated, biodynamic or organic seeds. (I should state I do own some shares in the Seed Coop which is a Community Benefit Society). Like many gardeners I have a weakness for buying seeds. Apart from the Seed Coop I also buy from the Real Seed Company in Pembrokeshire which is also an open-pollinated supplier and they have some rare seeds (I grew 'Aztec' broccoli this year.) They are a good source of the unusual. I also buy seeds when I am abroad, a bad habit probably, but when you walk into the Time Out Market in Lisbon and are faced with a rack of Demeter labelled seeds, what can you do? But it does bring back memories when I sow and hopefully crop them. Normally all is good, though the Greek basil purchased in Greece, that I hoped would form a nice round shape, did not.



By Charles Mitchell

My introduction to gardening was as a 3-year-old when my grandfather took me to pick gooseberries at the bottom of his garden in Woking. I remember vividly the prickles, as I do still now. As a young child I had a small vegetable patch and so it went on: I grew some vegetables when I was living in London and later in the North East. After moving to Wales, I discovered biodynamics, not through gardening but wine.

I watched Monty Waldin's series on his adventure to set up a biodynamic vineyard. It made sense; I got the idea of looking after the soil. We were already pretty much organic, but then I used the 500 and 501 preparations, although with limited knowledge.

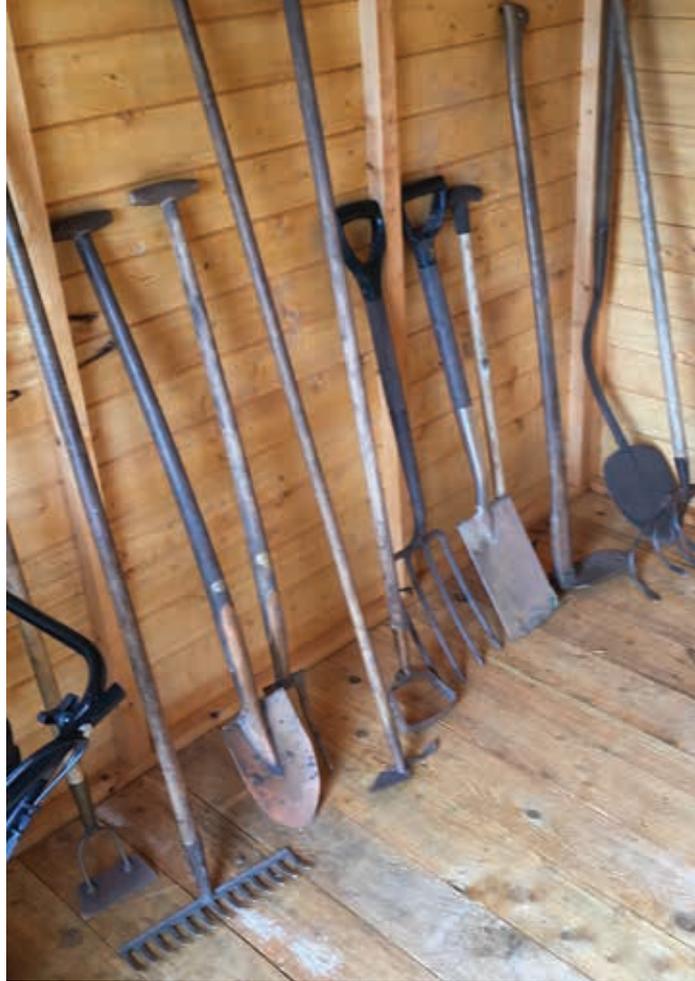
This year I attended a biodynamic course at Coleg Plas Dwbl in Pembrokeshire which was organised by the Biodynamic Association. This made everything I had read (and I have still not finished Steiner's Agricultural lectures - it is not a light read) begin to make sense. Over the years that I had gardened and grown crops, I saw the soil as just something I used, added some manure to, and all would be fine.

I am now far more focussed on the soil as the living place that needs nurturing and working in tune with nature and the cosmos.

On the course, Laura initially took us out to dig a hole, look at the soil and see the structure. Was it smooth or rough and could we see worm droppings? (we could) We were then sent out to sit and feel the "Spirit of the Place" which is a concept based on the writings of Goethe. This is one thing I have taken on board; I now spend 5-10 minutes sitting at the top of my garden, just absorbing it.

Composting was another subject covered during the course; building a heap with the preparations and making the Cow Pat Pit preparation. This Autumn I will be digging a →

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hole lined with bricks, divided in two so the mixture can be moved from one side to the other. The mix is fresh cow pats, baked and crushed eggshells and volcanic dust mixed together. After 4 weeks move to the other side (or you could just turn in a single chamber). After a further four weeks it is ready to use, diluted in water. 'Gardening for Life' by Maria Thun has more information on composting.

through the soil. I have also discovered 'Niwake' who do some nice tools from Japan.

I use both the App and the paper versions of the Maria Thun calendar, but as I was told on the course, I do not follow it strictly. Due to work or travel I cannot always plant on the right day according to Root/Flower/Leaf/Fruit, but I do avoid 'Generally Unfavourable' times. Storage crops like onions I do lift on the suggested date. This year I am going to spray seeds with 501 preparation before sowing as it is meant to strengthen plants against fungus.

Over the last 10 years I think I have slowly evolved the idea of gardening for our space. Catching rainwater was a major breakthrough when I worked out that using panels over a structure could feed water into tanks (which I got from a builder friend who was chucking them out.) I then noticed

bees were getting trapped in the water, so I put corks in bags as a float. I have been looking for old cattle troughs - back in the 1960s every field had them, often unused and full of newts. I could not find them, so I just bought a new one. They are far easier to use than a water butt as you just dip in.

Autumn task's always mentions cleaning tools. I sort of do, but since I use them all the time my main task is sharpening things. Over the years I have been given a few Implementations Bronze tools. They are the only ones I now use, and they are meant to deter slugs, but I also like them for their sharpness



Projects for this Autumn are the digging of a small pond and extending the wildflower beds. The first wildflower bed I made (we have lawn and we agreed to make a corner into wildflower bed) has worked amazingly, it is full of insect activity. I am going to plant another fruit tree as I try and add one a year for environmental reasons as much as for the fruit.

Biodynamic gardening has changed the way I garden. I

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feel more involved in the space, though I do also spend some time listening to cricket while looking at the veg beds and thinking about what to do next. The Biodynamic Gardening club, which I joined when it launched, is useful to get ideas from other members regarding issues such as getting rid of cabbage caterpillars and so on. Recently members have been uploading pictures of their gardens, inducing some garden envy!

the morning. I tend not to wake up that early, but there is something wonderful about sitting in the early light stirring the bucket for an hour.

Hopefully more and more people will adopt biodynamics, it does not have to be followed as rigorously as initial reading might suggest. It is, after all, about looking after the soil, the crops will then flourish as will the wildlife. If

Gardening must be enjoyable, and I truly think using a biodynamic approach has made me appreciate the garden in a way I had not before. On the reflection of the year the pear results, and apples, have been better due to spraying with valerian earlier in the year when frosts threatened. Crops seem to have been better generally; the raspberries keep coming and the crops have been better than last year. I have had a few crop failures. Peas refused to germinate when direct sown this year and next year I am going to use root trainers. I have discovered some that are made of rubber rather than plastic. I used the 500 preparation once before sowing in the spring and 501 twice. I enjoy getting up to stir the Horn Silica Preparation at 6.00 in



the Association do more courses next year, I would highly recommend them. The course I attended was the best gardening learning - experience I have had. Having grown crops for 50 years on and off I thought I knew a bit. But the course opened me up to new ideas and methods, although if you look back 300 years a lot of these methods were normal then. Planting by the moon and planets and fitting in with the rhythms of nature is not new, we just forgot how to do it in the post-industrial revolution world.

Charles's top tip for saving water in the garden – he won the prize in our BDGC competition for how gardeners can make a difference to climate change

