

BEGINNING BIODYNAMICS FOR THE BACKYARD GARDENER

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Nearly one hundred years ago, some farmers asked Rudolf Steiner for help in reversing the declining health of their crops, seeds and animals. These attentive farmers were observing increasing problems not only with crops and pests, but also with animal diseases and sterility. Steiner pointed out that it was the overall health of the soil that determined the health of the plants, animals, and ultimately humans. Through his insights into the forces and processes at work behind natural phenomenon, Steiner gave instructions for making remedies from specific plant, mineral and animal materials to enliven the soil and restore the vitality of crops, animals, and humans.

These remedies are now called biodynamic preparations. They include the Compost Preparations (BD #502-507), and three field sprays: BD #500 (horn manure), BD #501 (horn silica), and BD #508 (Equisetum avense). They are special inoculants and stimulants, which augment the benefits of good gardening practices such as organic, ecological, and sustainable methods.

The preparations may be thought of as homeopathic-type remedies because they are potentized and used in very high dilution in a way that is similar to homeopathy; and they work on an energetic or frequency level in addition to a material or physical way. The quickest and easiest way for a backyard gardener to get started with biodynamics is with the Pfeiffer Field and Garden Spray and the Pfeiffer Compost Starter. The Pfeiffer products were developed in the 1940's by biochemist Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, one of Steiner's foremost students and a close associate. They contain all of the biodynamic compost preparations plus BD #500 (horn manure), as well as a concentrated mixture of cultivated beneficial soil bacteria, enzymes, fungi, and plant growth hormones.

Applying Pfeiffer Field and Garden Spray

The Field and Garden Spray is a good way to get all of the biodynamic compost preparations and the horn manure into the soil efficiently. In the spring, it is sprayed over the garden area before planting to stimulate seed germination and strong root development. In the fall, it is sprayed to aid in the breakdown of plant residues when they are turned under. The Field and Garden Spray may also be used as a seed soak, or as a root soak, before transplanting. Through the season, it may be used on the soil or as a foliar spray, particularly to the underside of leaves, to promote growth and to help alleviate stress from adverse weather conditions. When applied to a green manure or cover crop right before it is turned into the ground, the bacteria and other micro-organisms dramatically decrease the decomposition time, allowing for replanting in as little as two weeks.

One unit of the Field and Garden Spray (two ounces of dry powder) mixed with three to five gallons of water will treat up to one acre. Portions of the unit may be used to treat smaller areas; for instance one teaspoon would be used to treat a 1,000 square foot area. Although one may be tempted to treat only the garden area, it is beneficial to treat as much of the surrounding area as is practical so that a larger biodynamic energetic field is created. The spray is applied in the late afternoon or evening and out of the full sun, when the earth is breathing in. If one does not have a garden sprayer, a whiskbroom, wallpaper paste brush, or a brush made by tying together a bunch of flexible twigs may be used as well. Maximum soil contact is desired but complete coverage is not necessary as the droplets will resonate with each other and create an energetic field effect. For open garden soil, the area sprayed may be raked to bring the effect into the top three to four inches of soil more quickly. The spray should not be applied to dry, parched soil as

the effect will be lost. Moisture is needed to hold the energy and keep the micro-organisms alive; on the other hand, the spray should not be applied immediately before a rain.

Pfeiffer Compost Starter

The Compost Starter is applied with each layer as you build your compost pile. The breakdown process is accelerated and aided by the beneficial micro-organisms which direct the decomposition and transformation in a healthy way. More of the nutrients are retained; leaching into the ground and loss of nitrogen/ammonia to the air is reduced, resulting in a better-quality finished colloidal humus. The Starter is mixed with water and applied to the layers with a sprayer or watering can. If the heap is already built, holes about a foot apart can be poked half way or more into the heap and the liquid poured into the holes. The dry Starter, mixed with very dry sand, can also be put into a shaker with small holes and sprinkled into the kitchen garbage pail before it is dumped onto the compost pile. It is important to keep the Starter dry until it is used, because moisture activates the bacteria; then when they do not have anything to feed on, they will die. One unit of the Compost Starter (one ounce) treats up to one and a half tons of compost or a 4' x 4' x 8' pile. A four-foot square pile, with a height of three to four feet is considered the minimum size needed to retain moisture and heat for beneficial decomposition. Half an ounce or about one tablespoon of compost starter would be used for this size heap.

Barrel Compost

Another preparation that you may like to use is barrel compost (BC-Biodynamic Compound Preparation), especially considering the ongoing problems at the nuclear power plant in Japan, and other sources of radioactive contamination. This preparation was created in Germany by biodynamic pioneer Maria Thun, in collaboration with Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, to mitigate the effects of radioactive fallout from the above ground atomic bomb testing in the 1940s and 50s. It is mixed with water and stirred in a rhythmic manner to activate and potentize it. It is stirred until a deep vortex is created, drawing in oxygen and other elements from the air. When the vortex reaches the bottom of the container, the direction of stirring is rapidly reversed, creating chaos until a new vortex is formed. This process is repeated for twenty minutes and then the mixture is sprayed or sprinkled over the soil in the evening. One unit of the BC will treat up to an acre; the whole amount must be used no matter how small the area to be treated, to generate enough of a force field to be effective. Now more than ever, biodynamics has a role to play in the healing of the earth and the spiritual evolution of humanity.

Recommended Reading:

Growing a Garden and Be Self-Sufficient, E. Pfeiffer and E. Riese - A classic guide for crop rotation, companion planting, making compost and using the biodynamic preparations in the home garden.

Pfeiffer's Introduction to Biodynamics, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer - Contains a more scientific overview of the preparations and their benefits as well as some background on biodynamics and Pfeiffer.

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Beginning Biodynamic Kits Now Available:

There are four new beginner kits that treat up to one acre. See our website for description.

www.jpibiodynamics.org/product-category/biodynamic-kits/