

Horny for Biodynamics?

Recently I attended a master class on Biodynamics hosted by Hamish Mackay at the beautiful Diggers Club run Heronswood gardens in Victoria. Before attending this I placed myself in the large grouping of people who are intrigued by but not wholly clued in about Biodynamic practice. I was very happy to discover that as an organic gardening enthusiast and promoter it was but a small step to embrace Biodynamic practices and a step that could see me be a part of a movement that can do an awful lot of good for the health of our planet. I think I heard Hamish say 'Fix the earth and we fix nutrition', sounds good but go to www.biodynamics2024.com.au for more about that. What a pleasant experience it was though, to hear of optimism for the planet.

It seems Biodynamics is borne of a greater appreciation for trusting in and observing what works in the world around us and acting to learn through experience. It's less about researching the parts but rather observing the whole and striving to improve from there. The health of the soil like with organic gardening is paramount to the practice of biodynamic growing. Hamish spoke of the idea of 'growing soil' and of the huge amount of life that should exist in the top layer to essentially act as the 'soils intelligence' where bacteria thrives and fungal networks become the 'product highway of the soil'. Apparently you can find upward of one billion microscopic life forms in a teaspoon of healthy soil being fed by the plants growing above them. Have a look at www.soilfoodweb.com to get a better grasp of this. Such soil holds onto water, or at least the life forms do, so making it more drought tolerant while also holding the top soil together in times of flooding. These same life forms are all too easily destroyed with many of the conventional farming and gardening methods we know, funny enough they don't respond well to tilling or herbicides. Healthy soil as we know means healthy resilient plants, a shared goal of Organic Growing and Biodynamics.

Biodynamics uses certain preparations to 'grow soil'. You may have heard of the use of cow horns such as where the manure of a lactating cow is stowed into a cow horn, which is then buried into good soil in the autumn and left for six months. This 'Horn Manure' preparation is all about abundance in stimulating bacteria and fungi in the soil to improve soil structure, also building humus and balancing pH. You don't need to go around burying cow horns though as the preparations can be purchased and are not expensive. There are other preparations too such as 'Horn Silica' which stimulates the photosynthetic process and excess carbon then comes out through the roots feeding soil life. It concentrates nutrients in plants and increases sap sugars and dry matter too. Hamish shared the story of a dairy farmer who noted how his neighbour's cows were sitting down to chew their cud twenty minutes before his. The neighbour's cows were on Biodynamic prepared pasture, it is through such observations of the success of using these preparations that Biodynamic farming is spreading.

Another interesting outcome of adopting Biodynamic methods is that grasses can play a big part in carbon dumping, more so in fact than trees. If just 10% of the worlds agricultural lands can achieve 2% organic matter in the top 30cm the carbon issue can be solved. It's also a damn good excuse to let your lawn grow a little longer this Spring to help your grasses grow a bigger root mass and get carbon dumping, give the mower a rest! I am and while you're not mowing the lawn have a look at www.bio-agriculture.org to learn more about Biodynamics and Climate.

It is through experiences of success that Biodynamic practice will take hold, a trust in knowing that something which works is worth doing and not requisite upon scientific data for us to continue doing it. Ironically efforts to collate such data have often been thwarted where farmers working with trials have quickly switched to 100% Biodynamic turning control crops over to Biodynamic methods because the improvement is so apparent that the need to maintain a control crop for means of comparison is super seeded by the desire to be a successful farmer and land carer.

There is more to Biodynamics than just what I've shared here, remember I've only been to one workshop; I didn't talk about the moon calendar at all did I? But what I learnt was that it is all about individuals connecting to what they are doing with the land and passing on their observations and lessons. This is something all of us can be a part of, I hope you'll seek to learn more and maybe get to one of the workshops held by Hamish this November in WA.

Live to be Full of Beans,

Dan Depiazzi

www.fullofbeans.com.au