

Bulletin on Biodynamic Weed Control

Malcolm Gardner (Aug. 24, 2013)

It is late summer and the weeds on your land may be flourishing and going to seed ... You may be interested, therefore, in trying a uniquely biodynamic method of selective weed control. The “ashing” method (also called “peppering” because the ashes resemble pepper) was originally described by Rudolf Steiner in his agricultural lectures, but not in such a way that it could be easily understood and reliably applied. In particular, the astronomical component of this method has been unclear, so much so that many people now try to do weed ashing without paying any attention to the celestial dynamics. With patience and perseverance, however, it is possible to reconstruct the logic of the astronomical timing of this method, and when I did so ... I was astonished to find that we are soon coming up on a series of unusually propitious astronomical periods! So I wanted to get this information out to you as soon as possible.

First of all, let me briefly outline the logic of the weed ashing method. A plant is most concentrated in its seeds. In order for these to sprout and grow, they must above all receive *water*. But water is not only a physical substance, it is also the mediator for the forces of the *full moon*, which serve to stimulate the plant’s growth. Steiner therefore recommends that crop seeds be planted and watered when the moon is approaching full. On the other hand, if we want certain other plants *not* to grow, we must treat their seeds with the opposite of water, namely, fire:

Just as water is indispensable for fertility, so is fire a destroyer of fertility. Fire consumes fertility. Therefore, if something that you ordinarily treat with water in order to promote fertility, is instead treated with fire, then within the household of nature you bring about the opposite – namely, extinction. ... Under the influence of moon-saturated water, a seed develops fertility and proliferates; under the influence of moon-saturated fire – or fire saturated with any other cosmic force – the same seed spreads a force of destruction [infertility]. (Steiner, Lecture Six, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture*, p. 125)

Given this context, it should be clear that the burning or ashing of weed seeds must also be done under specific astronomical conditions, but in his lectures Steiner does not fully spell out what these are. Some people have assumed that the best time is near full moon, but in his lecture notes (*SFRA*, p. 230), Steiner makes clear that one must pursue the opposite not only with respect to the water but also with respect to the timing. Reproduction, he writes, is promoted at full moon but *hindered at new moon*, and: “One works against growth by extinguishing the process that takes place between full moon and new moon – during this time [i.e., during *waning moon*] one destroys the fruit [i.e., the seed] by burning it.”

This indication is certainly helpful, but because of the shortness of the moon’s cycles, one can also expect that it would apply primarily to weedy ephemerals, i.e., to species with very short life-cycles like chickweed (*Stellaria media*), pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*), or quickweed (*Galinsoga ciliata*), which can go from seed to seed in less than two months. For weeds with longer life cycles, and especially for perennials and woody plants, the moon’s forces may not be enough, as Steiner himself suggests (*SFRA*, p. 117). The reproduction and growth of these kinds of plants may depend not only on the forces and cycles of the moon (and of course the sun) but also on the forces and cycles of Mercury and Venus, or possibly even of Mars, Jupiter or Saturn. Indeed, since we know from Steiner (*SFRA*, p. 114ff) that all the planets are active in every plant in some way and to some degree, the greater the number of planets that are optimally placed in their cycles at the time of burning, the more powerful the resulting ash or pepper should be. So what are the optimal times for these non-lunar planets?

Meditating on this question can lead to the following answers. Although the near planets Mercury and Venus do not orbit the earth like the moon does, they do pass between the earth and the sun and therefore, like the moon, go through a complete cycle of phases. Hence with these planets it makes sense that the right time for seed ashing is when they too are waning, or, even better, when they are nearly new. (When they are waning, Mercury and Venus appear as evening stars and after reaching their greatest eastern elongation they enter their last quarter until they become new at their inferior conjunction with the sun.)

The distant planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, however, do not undergo phases, so what is the best timing for them? Here we can recall Steiner's indication that coniferous trees are particularly influenced or governed by Saturn and that therefore they should be planted during Saturn's fifteen-year *ascending period* (*SFRA*, p. 26). (In the northern hemisphere, a planet's ascending period is when it is passing the celestial equator from its extreme southern declination to its extreme northern declination, just as the sun's ascending period is the six-month period between winter solstice and summer solstice.) From this it would follow that the best time to burn the seeds from a Saturn-governed weed would be during Saturn's fifteen-year *descending period*. And the same logic would apply to weeds governed by any other planet (all the planets including the sun and moon have ascending and descending periods).

From a practical standpoint, however, one usually does not know which planet or planets a given weed is governed by. Furthermore, it would be much more convenient and economical to be able to burn all one's weeds at once. Hence it would be ideal if one could find times when all the near planets including the moon were in their last quarter, or at least were waning, and when all the planets, or at least all the distant planets, were in their descending period. But of course the celestial dynamics are very complicated and for all these planetary cycles to coincide in this way would be very unusual... and yet, just now in the late summer and fall of 2013, for us in the northern hemisphere, this is exactly what will occur!

Namely, Venus will be waning from now until early January 2014 and will be in its last quarter after Oct. 30th. Similarly, Mercury will be waning from Aug. 25th until Oct. 31st and will be in its last quarter after Oct. 9th. And the moon will be in its last quarter from now until Aug. 5th, then again from Aug. 29th to Sept. 4th, from Sept. 28th to Oct. 3rd, from Oct. 27th to Nov. 2nd, and from Nov. 26th to Dec. 1st. (Note: the dates given here are for the first or last *full* day of the event in the eastern US.) Thus, from **August 29th to September 4th**, and again from **September 28th to October 3rd**, *all three planets will be waning (with the moon at last quarter)*. And, on **October 30th and 31st**, *all three will be in their last quarter*.

Even more amazingly, from now until Nov. 7th, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars as well as the sun will *all* be in their descending periods. Further, Venus will be descending from now until Nov. 4th, while Mercury will be descending from Aug. 4th until Oct. 19th and then again from Nov. 13th until Dec. 27th. The moon will descend from Aug. 3rd to 15th, from Aug. 30th to Sept. 12th, from Sept. 27th to Oct. 9th, from Oct. 24th to Nov. 5th, and from Nov. 21st to Dec. 2nd. Thus, from **August 30th to September 12th**, and again from **September 27th to October 9th**, *all seven classical planets will be in their descending period!*

Most astonishingly of all, these two sets of rare coincidences will partially overlap this year so that between **August 30th and September 4th**, and between **September 28th and October 3rd**, we will have the extraordinary situation of *all three near planets waning (with the moon at last quarter) and all seven planets descending!!*

These last two time periods would thus appear to be the very best times for burning general mixtures of weed seeds. On the other hand, if one is dealing *only* with ephemeral or annual weeds, the best time may be the two-day period of **October 30th and 31st**, when all the near planets will be at last quarter and all seven planets except Mercury will be descending.

I have not mentioned the zodiac here because, according to Steiner, with weed peppers it is not necessary to take this into account: “When one is trying to accomplish something in the plant world, one can stay within the planetary system” (*SFRA*, p. 121). This is not the case, however, with animal peppers, which are therefore even more challenging to understand and create. But it should be noted in passing that for vertebrate animal pests Steiner recommended ashing their hides when Venus is an evening star at “peak conjunction” with Scorpius (i.e., in the middle of the sidereal constellation), and that this event will occur this fall on **October 16th**, at which time Mercury will also be an evening star (waning) and all the planets except Mercury and the moon will be descending.

Finally, here are a few practical tips for making weed peppers:

- Collect the weed seeds when ripe and store them (dry) until the appropriate time (be sure to exclude any crop seeds). Consider saving some of the weed seeds to test their germination, growth or reproduction with and without the pepper!
- According to a remark by Steiner to Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, rootstocks as well as seeds can be burned (*SFRA*, p. 251). Burning whole plants is probably fine as well; the ash from the other plant parts may not be as effective, but it will serve to increase the volume of the ash, which is probably useful. (Steiner says that the ash has a large radius of effect, but that it can also be made “more homeopathic,” i.e., diluted, in order to make it easier to spread. One can also dilute with water, sand, clay, compost, etc. or perhaps even mix and broadcast with crop seeds.)
- Be very careful about burning poisonous plants. For example, with poison ivy, poison oak or poison sumac (*Toxicodendron spp.*), do not burn the stems, vines, foliage or roots because the toxic resin they contain will become airborne and life-threatening if inhaled. This resin is found even in the fleshy pulp (mesocarp) of the white “berries” (which are actually drupes, like a peach); therefore carefully separate the pulp and burn only the hard “seeds” (i.e., the endocarp with its enclosed seed, which is like a peach pit with its seed).
- Burn the seeds or plants thoroughly; don’t just toast or char. Steiner recommends “a simple wood fire” (*SFRA*, p. 118); he does not say anything about limiting either the heat or the air (which latter would lead toward charcoal rather than ash). He also does not specify that the wood ash be segregated from the weed ash. However, if one does not want to add the weeds directly to the fire (e.g., in a fireplace, wood stove or grill), one can put them in a pan and either heat them from below or from above (e.g., with a blowtorch).
- Keep good records of what you do and label the ashes well.
- Make as much ash as possible! It is simple to store (keep it dry) and Steiner suggests that the treatment might have to be repeated for several years. Even if you don’t need it again, if you have success, your friends will certainly want some.
- It is not clear whether this ashing technique can distinguish between genetically modified and non-genetically modified seeds. If you have a problem with GM contamination in your seed supply, you might get some pure GM seeds, ash most of them and then test (in pots!) whether the ash inhibits germination, growth or reproduction in the remaining GM seeds, but not in your non-GM seeds.
- Please share your results!

Your comments or questions about specific situations are welcome. Let us take advantage of the opportunities the cosmos is offering us this year and work together to document and develop this uniquely biodynamic alternative to herbicides!

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