

Seasons of the Soul: The Biodynamic Connection

2003 FES article by Sylvia Jordan

**“If you want to heal with plants,
first learn to live with plants.
Walk the Wheel of the Seasons.
Align your heart
with the heart of Mother Earth.”**

Advice to Patricia Kaminski in 1973 from Hopi Elder Thomas Banyacya

The herbs and flower essences at the heart of the ***Seasons of the Soul*** product line are created with love and care at Terra Flora, a beautiful 17-acre garden sanctuary located in Nevada City, California, in the foothills of the luminous Sierra Nevada mountain range. From seed to harvest to hand-bottling, the ***Seasons of the Soul*** preparation process reflects a deep and abiding respect for—and celebration of—the elemental rhythms of life.

“We bring a meditative quality to everything we do,” says Patricia Kaminski, director of the Terra Flora gardening program. “There’s an ingrained awareness that we’re producing a sacred substance. Our motivation is not selling for its own sake, but to promote healing. That awareness informs everything we do. At ***Terra Flora***, gardening is more than another work assignment. It’s a conscious creative activity.”

DEMETER CERTIFIED BIODYNAMIC®: THE AGRICULTURAL GOLD STANDARD

The Biodynamic gardens at Terra Flora are Demeter-Certified—the worldwide “gold standard” of agricultural integrity. (Products grown at Terra Flora are also Certified Organic.) The Biodynamic way of growing originated as part of the work of Austrian scientist and philosopher Rudolph Steiner, who also founded the Waldorf Schools, and many other social, scientific and cultural endeavors. Biodynamic certification includes all aspects of organic certification, but goes further to acknowledge the dynamic, living processes in all of nature. For example the cyclic rhythms and forces that influence the development of the plant, from the depths of the earth to the sun, moon, stars, and planets are vital to the Biodynamic program. Biodynamic medicines and growing techniques are designed to utilize the basic holistic principles at work in nature in a way that brings about balance and healing for the earth and humankind.

At Terra Flora, the gardens evidence respect for the land as a living organism. In keeping with Biodynamic principles, the “circle” is viewed as a sustainable whole, using outside materials only when absolutely necessary. In winter, cover crops of legumes build fertility and soil structure in the beds, creating humus in the clay and “massaging” the soil.

“Legumes are the workhorses of our gardens, anchoring nitrogen to the soil with their

natural fixing capacity,” says Terra Flora gardener Daniel Nicholson. “It’s a holistic way of increasing fertility, as opposed to the harsher, destructive use of nitrogen in chemical fertilizers.”

Part of the Biodynamic method includes the application of what are known as Biodynamic Preparations—alchemically prepared plant and animal substances that are combined in specific formulations at certain times of the year, to become medicine for the land, the compost, and direct application to plants. The concentrated forces in the preparations are viewed by the Demeter Association as “medicine for the Earth.”

“Biodynamic agriculture recognizes the two essential poles in Earth’s creation—the alchemy of light and dark, and the balance of levity and gravity,” explains Patricia. “One of the most fundamental Biodynamic medicines is the Cowhorn Preparation, also known as BD 500, which works into the depth of the Earth and catalyzes its innate fertility. On the other hand, the Crystal Application (BD 501), utilizes specially prepared and potentized quartz crystal to attract ascending forces of levity and light. “Using the Biodynamic Preparations requires a living sense for the Earth as a Being - the dark recesses of the Earth’s interior as well as what emerges to the surface and ascends into the light.”

Composting is an essential part of the Biodynamic method. “It’s our main fertility source,” says Daniel. “The soil is a living organism, and compost is prepared so that it is vital and inwardly active as well. Its life force then awakens and enlivens the slumbering plant in the fullness of time. The growing process reflects celestial rhythms, and the cycles of human life as well.

“In the Biodynamics tradition,” Daniel continues, “humans play a positive role in replenishing and nourishing the earth—we’re not just depleters. Through composting, we actually have the chance to create something that gives back to and nourishes the earth. We call it spiritual gardening.”

FROM BEE TO BOTTLE

The herbs and flowers that go into *Seasons of the Soul* are gathered by Kendra Barnett, one of the caretakers for the FES product line. Harvesting methods and timing depend on the plant. For instance, says Kendra, “**Calendula** blossoms have their most vital forces in the early morning. I pick **Calendula** blossoms when they first open up in the morning—the flowers are sticky and sweet, so the bumblebees love them. It’s like a game between me and the bees to see who can get there first. It’s a privilege to share my space with them.”

True to the Biodynamic ethic, at Terra Flora each plant is harvested at its “celestial peak.” “If we were to rush things, the plants wouldn’t grow into their full medicinal force,” says Patricia. “Part of what makes *Seasons of the Soul* oils so special is that every element they contain is harvested at its time of greatest cosmic activity.” **Dandelion** is harvested in early spring, followed by **Arnica**, **Calendula**, and **St. John’s Wort** and **Mugwort**.

BRINGING SOUL TO THE SUBSTANCE

While planting, tending, harvesting, and preparing the *Seasons of the Soul* oils, Kendra and her colleagues say prayers and affirmations based on the oils’ unique purposes and characteristics. “There’s a different prayer for each oil,” says Kendra. “I say them inwardly, with intention, keeping a clean space within myself and focusing on truth, clarity, and goodness. I believe that helps deepen the connection of the oils—each one

has its own 'soul mood.' It's one of my favorite things I do here.”

Rob Matthews, one of Terra Flora's gardeners, feels that “working with the **Seasons of the Soul** oils is an amazing process. Right from the beginning, there's such a deep level of intent. I think that shows up when people use them—they're blown away by how quickly and profoundly they take effect.

“I have several friends who use the oils with their massage clients. Over and over their clients report, 'This has given me better results than anything I've used before.' Because of that immediate reaction, **Seasons of the Soul** is a perfect introduction into the world of flower essences.”

HAND-CRAFTED HERBALISM: A LOST ART

During each phase of the **Seasons of the Soul** preparation, all work is done by hand. The herbs and blossoms are added to pure golden olive oil grown and produced in the Biodynamic community of Sekem, Egypt— “the crème de la crème of their kind,” notes Daniel—and are then solar-infused in small glass containers, warmed by the natural light of the spring and summer sun.

“Solarization, like decanting—the process of drawing off liquid and pouring it from one vessel to another—is a lost art,” says Patricia. “The word 'decant' itself has a primal creative power, hearkening back to the Medieval Latin origins of 'chant' and 'incantation,' when herbalists recited prayers and affirmations during the decanting process. We believe in honoring that soulful tradition. Our methods take time and patience, and are much more labor-intensive, but it's worth it.

“There's been a shift toward valuing efficiency over integrity in the natural-products marketplace. Many herbal companies 'cook' their infusions in large vats with artificial heat sources. We infuse our oils with solar warmth the old-fashioned way, in small batches. No matter how large we grow, we will always do things the small way.”

After solarization, the infused oils are kept dark and cool in the “Aroma Room” until they're ready to be mixed with pure botanical essential oils and Biodynamic flower essences. Mixing is done in small five-gallon batches to keep the oils fresh.

The rows of jars that line the Aroma Room are a feast for the eye. In fact, Patricia points out that the multisensory element of the **Seasons of the Soul** oils is one of their most delightful qualities. “For instance,” Patricia notes, “our solar infusion of **St. John's Wort** blossoms results in an intense red hue and rich aroma, unlike others on the market that are quite pale by comparison. We don't consider our product acceptable unless we see that deep burgundy color. We use only the most radiant orange flowers for **Calendula Caress** and the oil has a glowing golden color.

If we remain open and willing to listen, flowers can teach us a lot about ourselves. The **Seasons of the Soul** line is a heart-warming way to begin— or extend—that journey of discovery.”