

where the 501/508 application was sprayed and where it ended, at the edge of our lawn. The entire lawn was still green on our side, but our neighbor's lawn was covered in frost. While I was not trying to achieve frost protection, it was a learning experience in the warming properties of the silica in 501 and 508. That was several years ago. I am happy to report that the rust disease has yet to make an appearance since that time in 1998.

All nine of the biodynamic preparations have been applied each year since then, with the 508 (fermented tea version) being applied more than the other preparations. Why? There seems to be a need for it in my geographic locality. The need does not arise because of chronic fungus problems, on the contrary, but to help as an overall balance considering the location is in a valley next to a small stream.

–Patricia Smith

### Please Write

We welcome your comments, articles, letters, photos, book reviews and shared experiences of observations in biodynamic farming and gardening. Send to: The Editor – *Applied Biodynamics*, P.O. Box 133, Woolwine, VA 24185.



The frost-free lawn in foreground was treated with applications of 501 and 508. The turfgrass with frost is the untreated area (the neighbor's lawn). Photo © Patricia Smith

### Patricia Smith

## Using Valerian the Way Steiner Indicated – An Update

A few years ago the article, “Prepared Valerian: The Secret of Finished Compost,” written by Joe Stevens,<sup>1</sup> (*Applied Biodynamics*, No. 33, Summer 2001) reported of his discovery of a misinterpreted instruction in the Agriculture lectures. His findings conclude that Dr. Rudolf Steiner indicated that valerian (BD #507) be added to the pile *after* the manure becomes fertilizer. Apparently this instruction seems to have been overlooked by many for nearly eighty years. After the article was published, Joe received a few responses.

### The valerian experiment

In the same issue with the article, “Prepared Valerian: The Secret of Finished Compost,” was an experiment form for people to record their experiences of using valerian-treated compost. From this experiment, we received one response. This came from Heike-Marie Eubanks of Myrtle Point, Oregon. Heike-Marie lives on a forty-two-acre farm. The land is leased for grazing except for one acre where she has a large orchard and a year-round vegetable garden. Following is her summary from using valerian finished compost (see page 6 for photographs of the cover-cropped beds).

This is an experiment with a cover crop on two garden beds. The treated valerian compost area [Cover crop bed #2] is fifty square feet and the other area [Cover crop bed #3] is a full-size bed of one hundred square feet. Cover crop planted: crimson clover, common vetch and rye. Even though the cover crop on the untreated area [Cover crop bed #1] was planted two weeks earlier and also had 500 applied the day before planting, the crop came up rather spotty and then gradually disappeared. The treated area performed much better. I have now (March 2002) a lush stand of mostly crimson clover and chickweed while the other bed [Cover crop bed #1] is pretty bare.

The garden compost was made in fall 2000 from garden refuse and hay; it did not contain manure (maybe a bit of chicken). It was prepped with the BD compost preps and heated up normally – not as hot as my manure added compost usually did. It probably was up to 120 degrees initially.

I used approximately one-half wheelbarrow full per bed. That's a big construction type wheelbarrow. It was quite mature, a beautiful, earthy humus-like structure.

My soil is clay-loam on old volcanic rock-mixed with sedimentary-topsoil, which varies quite a bit even within the



Cover crop bed #1 – Untreated area, no valerian compost.



Cover crop bed #2 – The front half of the bed is untreated. The far half of the bed is treated with valerian compost.



Cover crop bed #3 – Treated area with valerian compost. Photos are courtesy of Heike-Marie Eubanks and were taken in Spring 2002.

garden of 2,000 square feet, but has been treated the same over the ten years it has been under BD.

### Postscript

Following the experiment, untreated compost was applied to the two beds.

After the winter cover crop with the valerian compost, I tried to grow tomatillos in that half bed that had the valerian compost and they would not do anything. They were just sitting there. I took them out and planted black beans (bush beans) and they did okay in the half bed. The full bed with the valerian compost I grew tomatoes and they did alright. That was in 2001. In 2002, I grew cranberry beans which is a dry bean in the full bed and they did okay, and the Roma beans (a bush bean) in the half bed. The half that had the valerian compost did better than the untreated half. In 2003 I had corn in both beds and they did great. I had a very good corn year. I will start to use the valerian compost again this year.

### Results of valerian-finished compost

After reading Joe's article about valerian in 2001, Steve Storch of Water Mill, New York changed his method for making biodynamic compost, by adding the valerian to the finished pile. He has found that the compost works much better.

Steve specializes in care of soils, trees, shrubs and turfgrass in his business, Natural Science Organics and also maintains a CSA. The results he has seen from the valerian finished compost include a perkiness in growth, increased flowering, enhanced color of fruit and flowers and dramatic earthworm activity from observing the vast amounts of earthworm

castings in lawns and gardens after application. He also uses this sequence of adding valerian last for making the BC [Biodynamic Compound Preparation, a.k.a. Barrel Compost]. He waits for both the BD compost and the BC to be finished, and then adds the valerian. Steve does not sprinkle the valerian all over the compost. Instead, he pours it down a hole in the middle of the pile. After adding the valerian preparation, he then waits two weeks before using the compost or BC.

In addition to the compost working better, it also has properties of frost protection. Steve has reported that impatiens normally will die from exposure to the first frost. However, for impatiens treated with the compost finished with valerian, they were able to withstand at least four frosts before giving in to the chilled weather—quite impressive hardiness for a tender annual. Steve figures, “The valerian, when inserted along with all the other preparations into the compost pile is wasted at this stage and loses its effectiveness when added so early. If everyone read the section in *Agriculture* about valerian on page 104, they would find this is what Steiner meant that the valerian is supposed to be used last.”

Steiner's indication regarding the compost preparations is as follows:

And so it seems to me that you should try to produce fertilizer by enriching the manure with these five ingredients – or appropriate substitutes – in the way I have suggested. Fertilizers of the future should not be prepared with all kinds of chemicals, but rather with yarrow, chamomile, nettle, oak bark, and dandelion. A fertilizer of this kind will in fact contain very much of what is actually needed.

And if you can still bring yourself to do one more thing,

before using this treated manure, press the blossoms from the valerian plant, *Valeriana officinalis*, and greatly dilute the extract with warm water. The extraction can be done at any time and can then be stored. If this diluted valerian juice is applied to the manure in a very fine manner, it will stimulate the manure to relate in the right way to the substance we call phosphorus.

—Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations For the Renewal of Agriculture*, p. 104

### The icing on the cake

While responses were quite sparse, the encouraging results of Heike-Marie's and Steve's compost, serve as some proof that valerian yields its most effective influence when it is added after the pile is finished, i.e. compost. To understand valerian's role in compost making, the process which occurred to me is the idea of making a cake. First you make the cake batter and then you place it into a pan for baking in the oven. Once baked, you take the risen cake from the oven to cool. You now take the icing and frost the cake. The cake and the frosting complement each other well. But what if you added the icing to the cake batter before it went into the oven? Well, it may come out alright and the icing would become another ingredient of the cake batter, but its purpose would be lost and be better served topping the

Steiner says elsewhere that people are not yet accustomed to reading his books very closely. This would still seem to be the case today because, as you see, there is no basis in the indication text for applying valerian preparation to a pile not ready for use.

Joe Stevens, "Prepared Valerian: The Secret of Finished Compost", *Applied Biodynamics*, No. 33, p. 8

baked cake, helping to seal the moistness and freshness in the cake itself. Like icing on a cake, valerian holds an influence of keeping the finished compost pile enlivened in nature as well as playing a key role in retaining the qualities of the other five biodynamic compost preparations.

We invite readers to re-visit this most important interpretation by reading the articles about valerian in *Applied Biodynamics* No. 33 and trying out the valerian experiment for yourself. Please let us know of your results and if possible, photos to accompany your findings.

### Note

- 1) For further information about valerian, please contact Joe Stevens, 31 Bethwood Drive, Loudonville, NY 12211; voicemail: (518)465-9472.