

The Valerian Preparation (BD #507) Revisited

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Last spring, as I was looking through some of the past issues of *Applied Biodynamics*, I came across an article titled, “Prepared Valerian: The Secret to Finished Compost” (Summer 2001, Issue No. 33). Since I was getting ready to harvest valerian flowers, this caught my eye. In the article, the author (Joseph Stevens) proposes that Rudolf Steiner’s indications regarding the use of the valerian preparation were mistranslated and misinterpreted as published in both the Adams and the Creeger/Gardener editions of the *Agriculture* lectures. Stevens asserts that Steiner advised farmers to apply the stirred valerian preparation to the finished, transformed, colloidal compost rather than to a newly built pile along with the other five compost preparations. He further postulates that the success Alex Podolinsky has achieved in Australia, which includes millions of acres converted to biodynamics and the creation of thirty inches of topsoil in some places, is in large part due (in addition to other biodynamic farming practices) to the use of “Prepared” 500, where BD #507 is applied to the finished, colloidal BD #500 preparation.¹

Translations: A Closer Look

Stevens contends that the translators used the words “dung” and “dunger” interchangeably, when in actuality, Steiner used the word “dung,” when he referred to raw manure, and he used the word “dunger,” or fertilizer, when discussing the preparation-treated manure (finished compost). Stevens feels that the full effect of the BD #507 is lost when it is applied to raw manure or uncomposted materials. Stevens states, “According to the indications, prepared valerian activates the phosphorus, or ‘light-bearing’ substance. Phosphorus is the switch that turns on the ‘light’ which catalyses the crystallized fertility of the finished compost into energy available for plants. Losing this effect means that the radiant force of the compost never gets ‘turned on,’ and as a result, the effect...will lack a characteristic intensity.”

My curiosity was aroused, and I promptly reread the section about valerian on the last page of Lecture Five of the *Agriculture Course* (Adams translation, p. 100), which reads in part:

“And so I think you should try to create good manures, by adding these five ingredients – or suitable substitutes – to your manuring matter in the way indicated [Steiner had already given directions on how to make the five compost preparations in the

previous pages]. Manures in the future should not be treated with all manner of chemicals, but with these five: yarrow, chamomile, stinging-nettle, oak-bark, and dandelion. Such a manure will have very much of what is actually needed.

Now you have one more bridge to cross. Before you make use of the manure thus prepared, press out the flowers of Valerian [*officinalis*]. Dilute the extract very highly... Add this juice of the Valerian flower to the manure in very fine proportions. Then you will stimulate it to behave in the right way in relation to what we call the “phosphoric” substance.

With the help of these six ingredients you can produce an excellent manure – whether from liquid manure, or ordinary farmyard-manure, or compost.”

The Creeger/Gardner translation of *Agriculture* is similar, but does use the word fertilizer more often, and perhaps more appropriately.

The operative phrases for me in both translations are, “Before you make use of the manure thus prepared...” (Adams) and, “Even better, before using this treated manure, press the blossoms from the valerian plant and greatly dilute the extract in warm water...” (Creeger/Gardner). Ordinarily, one would not be using the manure until the composting process has transformed it. This indicates that perhaps one should be applying the stirred BD #507 closer to the time when the compost will actually be used.

In the same issue of *Applied Biodynamics*, Hugh Courtney encourages readers to conduct their own experiments on the timing of the application of BD #507. (“New Insights on the Valerian Preparation – A Call to Examine Old Habits in Biodynamics.”) Both of these articles are available for you to read or download on the JPI website (www.jpibiodynamics.org/node/597#attachments).

Results

Only a few readers responded to the call for experimentation, even though a form was included with the newsletter for people to record their observations using BD #507 on finished compost. A follow-up on their results was printed in *Applied Biodynamics* (Winter 2003-2004, Issue No. 43) along with an anecdotal report of using BD #507 to protect blueberries from early fall frost.²

Steve Storch of Natural Science Organics in New York state changed his method of making biodynamic compost and Genesis Compound (his enhanced version of barrel

compost a.k.a. Biodynamic Compound Preparation), and always waits for the compost to finish before applying the BD #507. Instead of sprinkling the stirred BD #507 over the whole pile, he pours it into a hole in the center of the finished compost pile and waits two weeks before using the compost or Genesis Compound.³ He has observed improved results by adding the BD #507 at the end of the composting process. Storch notes better plant growth, increased flowering, enhanced colors of fruit and flowers, and increased earthworm activity.” Additional benefits have included improved frost protection for tender annuals. Impatiens that usually succumbed with the first frost were able to withstand four frosts before dying off. Heike-Marie Eubanks in Oregon reported better growth of a cover crop on the areas where finished biodynamic compost treated with BD #507 was applied, in contrast to beds that received no treated compost. Patricia Smith, editor of *Applied Biodynamics* at that time, has since changed to applying the BD #507 at the end of the composting process and feels that it makes a finer compost with superior results and retains moisture longer.

Future Research

It seems that this question of when to apply BD #507 warrants further investigation and research. To really confirm the best time for application, three compost piles and test plots would need to be set up. One pile would have the stirred BD #507 sprayed over the outside of the newly built compost pile at the same time the other preparations are inserted into the pile. The second pile would have the BD #507 sprayed over the pile only after the other preparations have transformed the pile. And, the third pile would have the BD #507 sprayed over the pile twice: once when the other preparations are added, and again when the compost is finished. A further variation might be to see if there is a difference in the compost material and effects with an additional pile by inserting the BD #507 in a hole in the center of the finished compost the way Steve Storch does. The compost from the test piles would then need to be applied to three adjacent test plots with same soil conditions and the same seeds would need to be planted in each plot on the same day. Ideally, conventional analysis, sensitive crystallization, and chromatography tests would be conducted done on: all three finished composts, soil in the three plots some time after application of the compost, and on the plant tissue/juice of the plants growing on the three plots. It would also be good to keep track of the date and type of day (whether root, water, air, or fire) on which each step was taken.

This is just one of many research projects greatly needed

in the area of preparation making and use. I encourage anyone who has an interest in the question of the timing of BD #507 application to do further investigation and research. Please send your observations and findings to JPI so we can share them.

Notes

- 1) “Prepared” 500 – Horn Manure is made from finished BD #500 that is put into a ceramic crock and treated with one or more sets of Biodynamic Compost Preparations, the same way one would treat a compost pile. For larger volumes, the BD #500 is put into the crock in 4–5 inch layers with one set of the five compost preps inserted between each layer. BD #507 is lightly sprinkled or misted over the top layer. The crock is covered with a loose lid and stored in a root cellar or cool basement, allowing four–six weeks before use.
- 2) BD #507 has been used successfully in early spring to protect blossoms from frost and snow damage and has been used in the fall to protect fruit and plants from early frosts. It was applied in the evening before frost as well as the morning of the frost. See “Anecdotes and Antidotes – Biodynamics at Work.” (*Applied Biodynamics*, Winter 2003–2004, Issue No. 43. Read the issue online at www.jpibiodynamics.org/node/597.)
- 3) It is reported that Maria Thun advised against inserting BD #507 into a hole in the pile at the beginning of the composting process when the rest of the preparations were inserted as, at least in her locale, it tended to make the compost black and clump together like slag. One assumes that she did spray the valerian over the top of the pile. (*Applied Biodynamics*, Summer 2001, Issue No. 33, p. 7.)