



"Farming is the stewarding of the transformation of the mineral realm into the plant and animal realms, which allows us to more fully develop the human realm" Bob Bower, 2014 Stella Natura Calendar

Report from Greenery in Motion and the Farm at Woody End..

Spring has finally begun to peak its head out from under the snow and cold. I hope you're looking forward to the warm days ahead as much as I am. For more and more people spring means the planting of gardens—flower and vegetable—and you'll find plenty of options in the pages ahead. I know vegetables are HOT at the moment—and it's great that they are! But...as someone who loves flowers and has seen the difference they can make in the livability of a home, I'd just like to put in a plug for some annuals and perennials to add color to your landscape. Think of all the beneficial insects you'll be supporting as well – the more of them you have hanging around in your yard – the less work you need to do to control the “bad guys”.

This use of color came home to my sister and me this past year when she decided to plant peppers in the front of the house instead of a bright annual (usually marigolds – but we're flexible and use up what's left!). To listen to her complain about the green in front of the house and how long it was taking the peppers to turn orange and red (the reason she wanted them there) you'd think she didn't know that peppers take a season to produce. She also managed to forget that we now grow peppers in containers because we get much better production results – better heating of the soil and better drainage. Needless to say she's determined to have color out front this year to liven up the front of the house. So consider some bright annuals even if only in a couple of containers or baskets to add some extra life to your landscape.

What a winter it has been –as we all know so well! All of the barn animals have made it through in good shape, the greenhouse didn't collapse under the snow (although it was opened late this year – fuel is SOOOOO expensive!), and there's only a small amount of extra damage to the fences due to snow plow plumes so we can't complain. We did lose our lovely Katie but she was 16.5 and that's really old for a Labrador retriever. We think three of our does (girl goats) are pregnant. We tried for five, are sure of two (big as houses), and who knows about the third at this point? - Did I mention the long and hard winter??? We'll be at Young Children's Festival in April with the one baby (Dodie Do) we kept from last year. The two we know are pregnant are due at the end of April so you'll be able to see the babies when you pick up your plants. Our plan this year is to see if we can make hard cheese. We'll have some babies and older goats for sale this year. You also might also see a new dog around the place by then...we're beginning to think it's time. The ducks are in fine shape and producing lots of eggs. **If you're interested in buying duck eggs –let me know – outstanding for baking, meringues and deviled eggs.** I'll be selling them at the Westminster Farmers' Market, but can easily make other arrangements. I'm trying to convince my sister we really need two more ducks (someone is looking for a home for two) but she's not buying it yet....



***OBSERVE** the world in your garden – and make it your own. Test other's recommendations but value your own experience as valid for **YOUR** garden.*

Now out and into the gardens - we all need time in the garden after this winter.



Manage your yard and garden for the best results - for you.

I've spoken to some of you about your garden plans for the year ahead. I hope you all have them. As you plan your gardens and properties, remember to make sure the information you get is from the right growing zone and climate type - this is New England...not England, Washington state, North Carolina, Iowa - you get the drift. Climate and microclimate matter. **Keep in mind it has been a cold winter - not all of your perennials and shrubs will have made it. I've already seen some loss on client sights.** It's a combination of cold and very DRY winds. There's also a very heavy ice pad under the snow pack that may affect some of the more fragile crowns.

Everyone wants to have a great looking yard that the neighbors stop and look at - wishing their yard looked so good! And these days - people are looking for their gardens to produce quality food for the table as well. Totally achievable!!! Don't believe me? Here are a few key points that you need to work with in order to make all of that happen.

Take a Look at your yard

Your yard has its own identity/personality - its own **"spirit of place"** - a very old concept that needs to be looked at again. You've heard terms like mid-west prairie land, river bottomland, alpine meadows...these are the big terms used for large tracts of similar lands. What gets missed in so many discussions is that EVERY yard is both a part of a larger ecosystem and land type and distinctly its own event as well - it's the **combination of the wider world, its own site specifics and its human caretaker** (or human abuser). Notice that last statement. It's the real key to your success. Your job is to get to know your yard so well that you can read each growing season like a good book.

This spring - and again in the fall - take the time to inventory your yard. Start with the soil because everything starts there (it's not just "stuff" to hold up the plants!). Dig it up, smell it, work it through your hands, test it - get to know it well. Next step is to assess/list all of the plants and animals in the yard (that includes you, your kids and the neighbor's dog who visits every morning!). And finally - make a list of anything that's bugged you in the last couple of years (yard wise - not the national political scene!). Be specific: "I hate the crabgrass that shows up every summer along the driveway." "I can't stand those horrible webs that show up in my trees every fall." That's the kind of information that can lead you to make good long-term decisions. You should also make a list of everything that's gone particularly well: "I love how the Black-eyed Susan's glow through the entire late summer." That can help you highlight the strengths of your yard.



Now for that human caretaker - YOU!!!

If you look around, you'll see plants of all kinds thriving without any human help - or any magic fairy dust either! But - be kind to yourself - this doesn't mean that you're not needed. It does mean adjusting your thinking a bit. ☺ No one likes change and many people garden the way their parents did or however else they got started. What's needed is some re-evaluation and observation.

“**Attention is the purest and rarest form of generosity.**” Simon Weil... This generosity is what every farm [garden] needs, what the Earth seems to need, what each of our fellow human beings needs....Farmers [gardeners] can offer their attention to the world and **can help to change the rarity of true attention.**” Katy Lince, 2014 Stella Natura Calendar

Here are some questions you might want to answer...



Q 1: Where are your gardens located? They should be as close to your outdoor living space as you can contrive - that still has decent sun. Use your front yard, deck edge, back door, side of the driveway - doesn't matter as long as you see them every day.

Q 2: Do you think that plants are really alive and responding to their environment? Yes, plants are alive and responsive although many people don't think about that because plants don't move and talk back. They respond extremely well though to excellent care that meets their needs. Take the time to learn about the kinds of plants you're planning to grow and try to meet at least their minimum needs. **Check out The Secret Life of Plants** (by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird).



Q 3: How big are your beds? Human reach is about 18" so beds that are 36"-48" are easy to work with. If you keep beds to roughly 4'x8' (the classic size of a piece of plywood) you'll find that staying on top of things is much easier. ANYONE can find time to weed a 4'x8' bed. This way you won't be overmatched by any job before you even get started.

Q4: How wide are your paths? You can go two ways with this. Maximize space and production and keep the paths to 12" wide and hand carry everything you need or widen the paths to at least 30" and can even be two widths of your lawn mower. The wider space makes it easier to move around the garden and there will be less weed pressure because there is more airflow and more sunlight on the edges.



Then there's seed/plant selection

This is the part of garden planning that's the most fun! Everyone enjoys picking the plants that meet their specific needs or catch their imagination – or both!! Here are a couple of things to keep in mind...and they're echoes of each other.

- The younger the plant material you buy, the less time there is for the plants root system to be messed up. Any kind of container causes roots to circle and any circling reduces the plant's long-term production potential.
- The younger the plant material you buy, the more that you will have to pay close attention at the beginning because there is very little structure to the plant and it's vulnerable to climate stress (over/under watering, cold, heat – that kind of thing).

Finally...Plants have stages of development – just like we do (doesn't look the same though)

Almost everyone understands the seedling stage of development. It's the "baby" stage. It's easy to see that a very young plant is different from a plant in full fruit. This stage also happens with early spring development for perennials, trees and shrubs. Each on-going stage has "management moments" that can greatly enhance your chances for success if you can learn to step in and support your plants. Steps 1,2,3 and 4 are critical for annual plantings. Steps 1,3,4 and 5 are critical for perennials and woody plants.

Stage 1 is the seedling (or early spring) stage and it's the first (but not the last) point that the plant starts to make the decision about how much it's going to try and produce in that season. **This is the stage that leads to the greatest long term loss of production** though so take the time to get your plants started well: water below the roots, excellent nutrition close to the young plants, seeds or seedlings inoculated with microbes.

Stage 2 starts about 10 days from seed eruption or transplant of annuals and continues for 4-6 weeks or longer depending on species. This is the time that the plant puts on most of its size – creates the "scaffold" that the fruit will hang from later in the season. The end of Stage 2 is the next critical "management moment". **Weakness at this stage totally undermines the flower set and eventual fruit harvest – and sets the stage for insect and disease pressure.** This is the time to watch irrigation and use foliar nutrient sprays on any plants that are looking weak.



Stage 3 arrives with the first flowers. Continued scaffolding growth can continue only if there's enough energy in the plant and soil systems, otherwise the plant sends its remaining energy into flower production. This is where the first fungal pressures start to show up in the lower leaves as the plants weaken under the pressure to fill the fruit. Continue with the foliar support.

Stage 4 starts with the filling of the first fruit. It may very well end with the setting of that first fruit if there is no energy left in the system or it

can be the beginning of a long harvest period if plant energy has been managed well earlier in the season or steps are taken right now to boost the plants reserves. Many, many plants can produce fruits **through** the first frosts if they're well managed.



Stage 5 starts with the harvest of the fruit and ends as the perennial or woody plant goes dormant or the annuals die as the season ends. The time after harvest is the critical time for providing the nutrients needed to restock woody plants' energy systems – think of this as restocking the shelves at Stop and Shop or Price Chopper 😊 I do all of my tree and shrub soil level fertilizing in the middle to late fall. Woody roots will continue to absorb and stock nutrients until the soil freezes down about 6" – usually mid-late December at the earliest.

By the way, Mother Nature is not known for her consistency and lately she's been almost childlike in her ability to throw weather temper tantrums. We're getting longer, hotter and dryer periods (as well as colder, windier periods) - never mind the 6 weeks of rain we got last June ----and **plants need water consistency in order to thrive.** Water



can be too much of a good thing or too little – both need to be managed well if you want good results from your garden. **The goal is too keep the soil damp/damp dry for most of the growing season.** **This allows for maximum expansion of the plant's**

root system, maximum development of the soil food web and greatest access to necessary minerals for plant development. Run soaker hoses or drip lines. Beware of overhead watering – overhead watering loses up to 75% of its water to immediate evaporation. Use **drip tape** or **soaker hoses** under the mulch and on top of the soil. And **plan to water when the dew is falling** – about 3-4 hours **before** sunrise. You'll get maximum value from the water you apply and minimal damage from disease pressure. Watering at dewfall means that you lose no water to evaporation – total waste of time and money – never mind water! Plan to put your irrigation on timers and have them run in that 3-4 hour before sunrise window. This is when the natural world condenses water around the leaf (dew fall), and you get the best results possible for your efforts. Any watering done during the heat of the afternoon largely evaporates and is a waste of time. Only water then if

it's a real emergency or you know you can flood the entire root zone (like a planter).

Make sure your high production **beds are raised** – and if possible – **on a slight slope.** Don't make it dramatic! These can be simple raised beds (mounded and leveled), built raised beds, hugelkulture (HK) beds etc. This allows flooding rain to move down and away from the plant's crown ---- This change in grade means that the crowns of your plants are above flood level almost no matter what the natural world dumps into the garden. A 4" raised bed means that you'll need a rainfall of over 6" before the beds are flooded and any slope at all will help your garden handle up to 10".

And Mulch Everything!!!! Bare ground is susceptible to all kinds of environmental stress – the main reason that crabgrass flourishes – makes a wonderful Band-Aid don't you think?!?!?!?!? If you don't like nature's Band-Aid then learn about mulches. **Mulches** can be almost anything from newspapers, straw/mulch hay, compost, plastic, old rugs, bark mulch or anything else you can think of to cover the ground after the plants have been planted or the seeds are up.



Now for a quick look at the changes over the last five years for the larger horticultural and agricultural arenas

This quote showed up in the April 4 *The Week* (a periodical)

“Spring is here. If you are inclined to look for the meaning of life, get thee to a garden. There are profound reasons why **the garden is central in the sacred texts of major religions.** Since ancient times, it has been the place where the soul goes to exercise, while simultaneously engaged in a multilayered dance with the earth, plants, sun, birds, bees, hummingbirds, butterflies, night and day, temperature, the faithful earthworm, water minerals, fragrance, a cast of thousands of micro-organisms (inside and outside!), our stalwart friends the fungi, chlorophyll, nectar. **I think of it as a ballet in the biosphere.**” George Ball

And here's a link to the most recent *Worcester Business Journal*!!! This outlines the local story...

<http://www.wbjournal.com/article/20140331/PRINTEDITION/303279981>

This was found of all places in the Wall Street Journal! ... Massachusetts is one of two states that has actually added both farmers (last census) and farmlands. More and more people are working with the Local Food movements (and there are all kinds of subsets here) at all levels. People are interested in growing all sorts of plants and animals – both in an updated and modernized homesteading approach and in a growing for food and profit model. Many of these new farmers are younger (22-35) and some have no direct family experience with the world of farming and some are part of old farming families that skipped a generation on the farm. Many are working with intense production models on smaller acreages (land is HUGELY expensive in Massachusetts for farming). There's a strong push to keep the remaining agricultural land AS productive land at town, county and state levels. Young people are joining the exhilaration of growing their own food and Extension and Farm Bureau are growing again. There's a real feeling of "spring" in agriculture. **There's never been a better (and prouder!) time to live in New England!!!**



Growing and Eating Local Food:

There's a huge amount of interest right now in growing and eating locally grown food. It's easy to make this happen during the warm summer months – the weather works with us! It's much harder to eat locally in the winter. It takes almost a

complete mental overhaul to make it work. There are real reasons why stews (local meats and local root crops) were the rule as a winter staple. If you want to grow your own winter food then think about root crops of all kinds (turnips, beets, carrots, potatoes), cabbages and onions – all handled in a root cellar (totally appropriate name!) – apples and pears can be held there as well for a little sweetness. Put dry beans, winter squashes and pumpkins in an unused bedroom (warmer and DRIER!). Use lacto-fermentation and/or vinegar pickling for cucumbers,

cabbages, tomatoes and peppers. And can or freeze the rest. The big gap will be fresh greens – that's the one plant food group that needs to be bought unless you want to get into a home greenhouse! Try growing at least one of these crops this summer and holding them for winter use – your Thanksgiving dinner will really be celebration then!

And in Greenery in Motion's world???



The original custom growing plant lists were over **90% flowers** with a smattering of classic vegetables. Color was king and veggies were cheap – only die-hard gardeners put in their own tomatoes and peppers... Check out this year's list – there are still flowers on the list (and I'll have more growing at the greenhouse that aren't on the list) but **the list is now 90% vegetables** – and not very many of those listed are the "classics". More and more people care about both the flavor and the nutritional quality of the food they eat and are understanding that they can manage that best by growing it themselves.

All of the gardens I manage are doing well – and many are expanding or changing to meet the new needs of their owners. It's still the best of all worlds to work with people who want great gardens in their yards – everyone wins ☺

I've been a vendor at the **Westminster Farmers Market** for several years now and enjoy answering questions and plugging the more unusual vegetable varieties. To keep boredom at bay! - I've gotten really involved with Westminster's Agricultural Commission (hence the bigger picture)– **helping to run the market** (we have a core of 16 vendors and as many as 30 on event days), **working to develop programs and events that both educate and celebrate the growing world** and helping to expand the awareness and value of farming in town. Just to let you know some interesting dates at the market – we're having a **Planter's Party** on May 16, **How Does Your Garden Grow Q&A** on July 11, **Peak of the Harvest** on August 22 and **Westminster's Fair and Share** on September 19. Everyone has a great time – lots of activities for everyone (and the vendors have great eats!!).

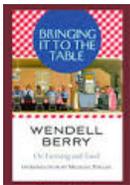


I've also been teaching (for ten years at Monty Tech) and the last two years at the Agway in Gardner. Once again – at the beginning – no one wanted to hear about veggies. This year, veggies, fruits and berries are the most popular classes. Either way – **everyone gets a good dose of practical and essential soil husbandry!** After all – **learning to really CARE about the soil and the plants is the first step in a long but absolutely fascinating journey** – come along for the trip!

This year we're going to offer some hands-on classes at the farm in late summer and early fall. It's hard to just talk about pruning, transplanting and other practical horticultural skills – you need to actually “feel” the skill with all of your senses. If there's a topic you've been itching to know about, let me know.

We're also going **to invite you to a Woody End Farm Weekend – September 13 or 14** – unless there's a hurricane forecasted!! The bio-nutrient dense beds and the HK beds should be in excellent shape and you'll be able to see how well they work and taste the fruits. The ducks will have cleaned up most of the year's slugs and will provide the eggs for some deviled eggs. We'll send out more information later in the summer – this is just a heads up.

You know I love books so here are two for you to consider picking up...



First up is Wendell Berry's Bringing it to the Table. This was a Christmas gift from my sister in-law and it was an eye opener. Mr Berry finally helped me fully understand the difference between animal husbandry and animal science. The first is wholistic in the best meaning of the word – the animal and its care is part of the whole of an integrated farm and animal science is the reduction of an animal to a mechanistic production unit... I could never understand why I hated the animal science courses I took in school but loved working with the animals.... Now I do!



And here's a book you must get if you want to tackle growing healthy fruit: Michael Phillips' Holistic Orchard. I've heard him speak 3 times now and each time he's superb. He has spent his life OBSERVING his trees and bushes and THINKING about the applications of what he's observed. The book has an easy style and is packed with information. There are very clear graphics describing woody plant cycles – better than any other book that I know of for this specific topic.



Soil amendments and blends

Most of you know that I use organic mineral fertilizers as the backbone of both garden installation and maintenance. I use a mixture of several kinds of fertilizer.

Here's the formula for what I use on an almost daily basis:

100lbs. **alfalfa meal** – huge booster of micro-organisms of all kinds

100lbs. **North Country Organics ProGro** – balanced mineral fert

40lbs. **Azomite** – trace mineral, highly active clay

40lbs. **Leonardite** (Soil activator) –stable carbon source

40lbs. **calcite lime** (only in the spring mix and only if not working with broad leaf evergreens and blueberries – omit if those plants are yours)

Granted that this makes a lot (use a dust mask when mixing or let the wind drift the dust away from you), but you can also see the proportions and can make smaller batches by cutting everything in half. **IF YOU KEEP THE MIX DRY** it will store well. Get it wet and you'll hate me and you won't like yourself much either!!! I think you'll be really surprised at the quality of plants that you can grow using this mix.

I will also have some of this mixed up and ready to sell for pick up day (as I mentioned – always use it heavily in the spring for planting) if that would make your life easier. You can bring your own container or I can give you a cat litter bucket (very handy recycling don't you think!!). The mix works out to be \$1.30 a pound and we can weigh out what you want from my buckets.