

PLANTING BY THE MOON: DOES IT WORK OR IS IT FOLLY?

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTOS BY **William M. Johnson**



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Gardening by the moon has been practiced for many thousands of years. Gardening by the moon is not about planting at night but involves planting and harvesting in accordance with the lunar cycle.

"Shine on, shine on harvest moon" is the song lyric which gardeners here on the Gulf Coast can sing most of the year because of the long production season.

While most gardeners ignore the phases of the moon in regard to optimum planting times, the moon and its phases are given significant credit by some for their gardening success or

failure. Planting by the moon does not mean going out at midnight to put your garden crop in!

I did my Ph.D. research in plant pathology (the science of plant diseases) and know well that the vast majority of plant production scientists will probably snicker at the very notion of planting by moon phases. It has an air of "hocus-

pocus" about it.

However, I would not castigate anyone who plants by moon phases. I find that condemning an age-old practice which has not been undoubtedly proven or disproved is risky and foolish. Since some of the best gardeners I know (including my parents and grandparents) plant by moon phases, I have a



double philosophy on the matter: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" and "If you haven't tried it, don't knock it!"

The danger of using moon phases solely as a planting guide is that regional timing and environmental conditions are often overlooked. To achieve the optimum growing conditions, these factors must be taken into account when moon dates are considered. For instance, according to one moon sign list, June 3-5 is an excellent time to plant potatoes—try to plant potatoes during June in Galveston County and get ready for a real disaster! Factoring in the influences of environment and specific growing regions makes decisions for optimum planting dates more critical. Good old common sense must be incorporated into the planting-by-the-moon philosophy.

Moon phases and gardening activities include:

- First Quarter (increasing from New Moon to about half-full): Plant annuals which produce their yield above ground and which are generally--and loosely--described as being of the leafy type that produce their seed "outside the fruit." Examples are asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, endive, lettuce, onions, spinach, etc. Be aware that most of these vegetables are cool season plants. As an apparent exception to the general rule of "outside the fruit", cucumber seems to do best in the First Quarter rather than in the Second, even though the seeds are inside the fruit.

- Second Quarter (increasing from about half-full to Full Moon): Plant annuals that produce their yield above ground and which are generally of the vining type that produce their seed "inside the fruit." Examples include beans, eggplant, peas, peppers, squash, tomatoes, and watermelon. These are not hard-and-fast divisions. If you cannot plant during the First Quarter, you will be safe to plant during the Second Quarter, and vice versa. And, there are many plants which seem to do equally as well when planted in either quarter, such as watermelon and garlic.

- Third Quarter (decreasing from Full Moon to about half-full): Plant biennials, perennials, and bulb and root plants, including crops planted in one season to winter over and produce their crops the next season. Such plants include trees, shrubs, berries, beets, carrots, onion sets, potatoes, radishes, rhubarbs, rutabagas, turnips and grapes.

- Fourth Quarter (decreasing from half-full to New Moon): Best for cultivation, pulling weeds and destroying pests of all kinds, turning sod, etc.

As can be seen, planting by the moon or figuring out when to plant by the moon can involve a little homework. Some gardeners plant according to moon phases only. Others combine moon phases with one or more of the twelve signs of the Zodiac (such as Cancer, Taurus) which requires a bit more coordination.

Of course, good gardening tech-

niques must still be followed regardless of whether you plant by moon signs or plant when you just have the time. Gardens will still need to be properly watered, pruned, mulched, cultivated, weeded and fertilized.

May the moon, good weather and common sense make your 2016 gardening efforts a great success.

Upcoming Programs

WHAT: HONEYBEES AROUND YOUR GARDEN

DATE: Saturday, March 19, 2016

TIME: 9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

SPEAKER: Master Gardener Robert Marshall will provide a presentation on the history, types, social life and hive structure of honey bees as well as the necessity of bees in gardens.

WHAT: TURNING DIRT INTO SOIL

DATE: Saturday, March 19, 2016

TIME: 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

SPEAKER: Master Gardener Jim Gilliam will provide a presentation on soil types in Galveston County and how to amend them to attain better tilth for gardens.

PLACE: Both programs conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main Street, La Marque)

RSVP: Pre-registration required (phone: 218-309-5065; e-mail GALV3@wt.net)

