

International Professional Group Herbs and medicinal plants

NEWSLETTER 6

January 2021

Dear members and friends of the Professional Group Herbs and medicinal plants,

Since March 2020, the Corona Crisis has changed the world in ways we would never have imagined. Even though things have certainly changed for the people who dedicate themselves to the cultivation of herbs and medicinal plants, they are still closely connected to the rhythms of the annual cycle in the plant world.

Review Agricultural Conference 2020

On the initiative of the Professional group Herbs and medicinal plants, a **three-day workshop** was held on the topic of “Herb cultivation between beauty and usefulness” with Ola Aukrust and Christina Spieß. This was very well received, as can be seen from the attached report by Lotte Jaspers from Belgium.

During the Group meeting, the guiding theme “What is a biodynamic medicinal plant?” suggested by the Section was again in the foreground. At this meeting, it became clear that a deepening of the mission statement work should be approached in the future as a research project, if possible, in regional groups.

Preview online Agricultural Conference 2021

From 11 to 14 February, the Agricultural Conference organised with the Youth Section on the theme “Breathing with the Climate Crisis – ecologically, socially, spiritually” will now take place online for the first time (see <https://hopin.com/events/breathing-with-the-climate-crisis-ecologically-socially-spiritually>).

We, in the steering committee, originally planned that HORTUS OFFICINARUM would give an impulse contribution on its research on *Artemisia annua* at the Group meeting. As this unfortunately cannot take place, Ruth Richter will briefly present the various research projects of HORTUS OFFICINARUM here.

Brief portrait

“Maintaining and conserving a diversity of medicinal plant species for organic cultivation and improving seed – this is the goal that the HORTUS OFFICINARUM association pursued with various projects in 2020. In the St. John's wort breeding project, 17 lines were tested for wilt tolerance and other agronomic traits at the very different locations of three of the growers linked in the HORTUS network. These had been selected from 33 origins grown and evaluated in the previous year. The project is supported by the Seed Fund of the *Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft* and by the *Swiss National Action Plan (NAP)* as part of the program for the sustaina-



Feld von HORTUS OFFICINARUM auf dem Bruderholz bei Basel.
Foto: Nora Hils

ble use of crops. Also under the NAP, the regeneration of aromatic and medicinal plants stored in the Swiss genebank was continued. For some species, the last propagation was 20 years ago and our horticultural skills are required to bring back to life seeds that have been kept under long-term storage conditions for a long time. In the case of two varieties of *Rosa rugosa*, for example, this was only possible after the seeds had been hand-sanded and given a warm chamomile bath.

A core concern of the association is the cooperation with physicians

and pharmacists in selection and breeding. For the first time, such a working group came together around the Chinese medicinal plant *Artemisia annua* to compare different types and varieties of this species in their development and, based on the impressions gained on the plants, to consider their suitability for specific therapeutic indications. (Further information: www.hortus-officinarum.ch/aktuelles/2020/RB19_Hortus-Officianum)

Succession in the coordination of the Group

With this newsletter, I am saying goodbye as coordinator of the Professional group Herbs and medicinal plants, as I am currently working on completely different topics and unfortunately no longer have the time and energy to continue this voluntary work adequately.

Bettina Billmann, who has been actively involved in the steering committee since summer 2017, will be my successor. She will introduce herself in the next newsletter.

Pioneering project on the website

A major goal of the Group is the networking of the many different medicinal plant and herb farms worldwide. To make this possible, we have started, in cooperation with the Section, to set up an international platform for biodynamic medicinal plant and herb farms on its website. Here you have the opportunity to present your business. The first farms are already online. **In order for networking to really take place, we would be pleased if many people would participate.** The form to fill in can be found at: www.sektion-landwirtschaft.org/en/thematic-areas/herb-and-medicinal-plants

Notes on new publications

Recently, the beautifully designed publication "Les Plantes Médicinales en Biodynamie. Une approche vivante du végétal" (in French) appeared with exciting research contributions. For more details see: www.sektion-landwirtschaft.org/arbeitsfelder/kraeuter-heilpflanzen/

Now we wish you all a strong and invigorating herbal year 2021.

Michaela Spaar (coordinator) with Ola Aukrust, Bettina Billmann, Henrik Hoeren and Michael Straub

Report about the Workshop “Herb farming: between beauty and utility” with Christina Spiess and Ola Aukrust during the Agricultural Conference 2020

At the Conference in Dornach in February 2020, a workshop on herbs took place in cooperation with the *International Professional Group Herbs and Medicinal Plants*. Named “Herb farming: between beauty and utility”, I expected to find myself in a group of people and farmers with very different backgrounds.

Christina Spiess and Ola Aukrust gave us a very warm welcome and when we all introduced ourselves, my prediction was confirmed. There were professional farmers as well as home gardeners from Paraguay to Malaysia. Some with a focus on taste and aromatics, others on aesthetics or medicinal characteristics. But one thing brought us together: we all had a special relationship with herbs.

The first day started with a blind meditation using our other senses and tasting on Chamomile and Dandelion Root, a perfect setting was created to connect with our inner motivation and relation on our herb farming activities. Afterwards the main theme was put on the table: the balance between beauty and usefulness... Generally herb farms are seen as smaller, less productive, cute and beautiful gardens. Though it is not only about nice and cute.

We did an extensive brainstorm on ‘arguments’ to base ourselves on when we make choices between an esthetically pleasing small herb garden or a viable herb farm (or or how these should not be in contrast with one another). We gathered a wide range of arguments and motivations to put ourselves somewhere in the chart between those two factors.

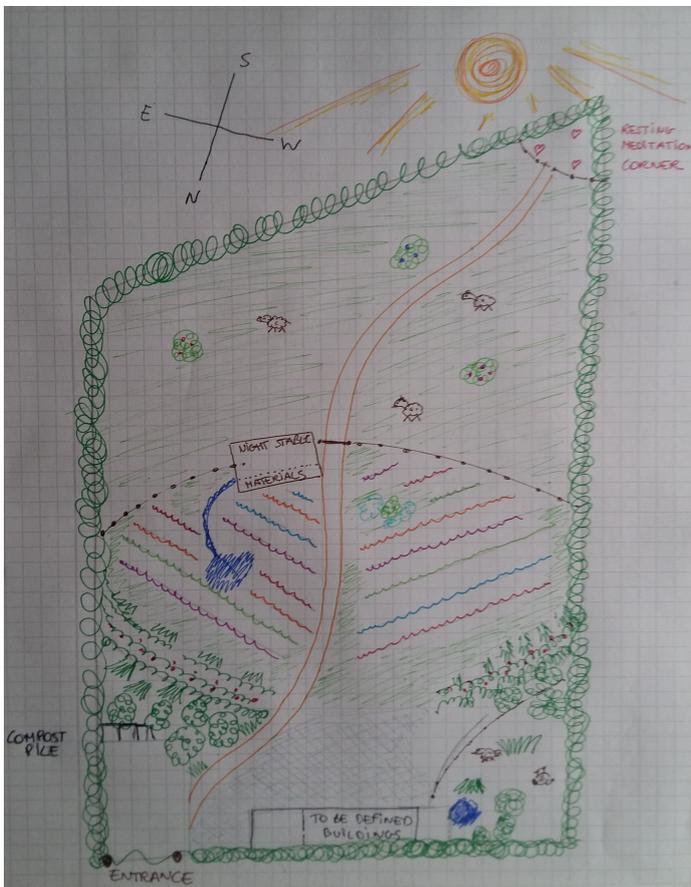
All this was to be settled in our heads over the night, and our homework was to think about our place in the chart and why we situated ourselves there. Those arguments would help us to draw our dream farm or garden the next day. I enjoyed the atmosphere that we had in the group very much. I carried a warm feeling of integrity with me that inspired me deeply. I think Christina has something special in her being and speaking that seems to facilitate our mutual intentions and Ola supports this with his experience and knowledge in a very earthly way.

On the second day we awoke our senses with a meditation on juniper and raisin. Then we started shaping our dreams by making the drawing of our farm. When finished, everyone explained their design with all the present elements and choices taken. As an example, I would like to explain my own drawing in order to illustrate all the different factors and elements, that you have to consider, when creating your own garden.

But first a few words about myself: I’m a young trained bio-dynamic farmer, with a farm ‘plan’ in my head that I would like to accomplish in the course of the next years, maybe after I gained some more experience. I’m also a social worker. Seeing plants, animals and humans grow is what moves me and makes me happy. I want to try to shape their environment in such way that they can develop in the best way as possible. I would like to offer a sustainable alternative to the current constructs in conventional agriculture, economy and society. This might also inspire and sensitize others.

I want to create a small herb farm with drying and processing of multifunctional plants in a circular ecosystem. As I want to make a living of it, viability is important. Good efficiency contributes to this. But I want it to be a beautiful quiet place close to nature. So my dream-garden should be a place of balance. Balance between efficiency and usefulness on the one hand, and elements of beauty, vividness and diversity on the other.

I start from a piece of land enclosed by pollard trees. Many of us start from scratch. I find it interesting to start from an existing ecosystem and explore and optimize it according to what you want to achieve with it, instead of creating something completely new. It's about 50 Ares big, loamy sand and completely flat. The tip is oriented south. I want to create openness and light on this side and capture the sun in a 'bowl' with crops on the other side. The bowl is formed in layers from higher crops such as trees, shrubs and berries and then the lower herbs. The last ones are planted in straight growing beds in function of smooth tillage and harvest. Animals are important to create a circular agricultural system, and they bring a certain presence with them that nothing else can replace. I want to start with 5 sheep in the upper part, grazing under fruit trees and some chickens in a wilder woody part. The sheep provide a nice landscape and give valuable ruminant manure in their night stable, while the small chickens can be placed in mobile runs over the herb beds to clean them from weeds, unwanted insects and crop residues. I thought about a beehive, but as I'm allergic to bees I prefer installing elements to attract more solitary bees and other insects. That can be nice arty insect hotels that also have big educational opportunities.



Another thing in circularity is to use as much as proprietary material flow as possible. That's why I want to prune and shred the pollard trees to use as mulch and brown material for the compost pile. The tree species is also suitable as a fodder tree for the sheep. They can first nibble off the branches before being shredded.

About design... A lot of the participants want structure in their gardens, through lines, spatial surfaces, figures, (paved) paths, delineated borders. I saw a lot of circles with a central point in the middle and figures around it. For me, that would break the natural design and it would make efficient harvesting and tillage harder. Some also used this figures to put plant groups according to medical use, origin and plant family together. I will group plants with similar needs to be able to take care of each bed in its specific way.

Like many others, I want a quiet, cozy corner. I would like this in the far corner,

which gives a view of the entire plot. This place seems very suitable to meditate on the plants and elements, the farm individuality, to sharpen the connection with the surrounding and myself. A bit remote, but still close and, above all, overlooking.

Another important aspect is water. Water as a moving element, as a growing medium, as a spiritual aspect and of course a water feature can be and sound enchanting. On the wooden night stable for the sheep, I collect rain water and from there it flows to a moving water element that lies between the beds. Water has a special meaning to me in the system, so I want to create enough space for it. For that, I will take away some cultivation areas, but it feels like it belongs there.

At last, we talked about (necessary) buildings and sheds and how to incorporate them into the whole. That is under development for me because I am still fine-tuning my processing method and marketing strategy. The surface of the existing buildings will be sufficient, but the layout must be adapted and a room must be converted into a food-safe processing area. In addition, the exterior must be embellished to be included in the environment.

This workshop had a central place in my experience of the conference. I found it very educational to listen to and exchange about our visions and choices. The meditations and the state of connection with others, myself and what we do touched me a lot. I am grateful to Christina and Ola for their commitment and would like to thank all participants for sharing their dreams and giving a barrel full of inspiration and strength.

Lotte Jaspers, Belgium

Incontournable

Le Calendrier des semis Biodynamique 2021

Produire des fruits, des légumes et des céréales de qualité, riches en éléments nutritifs, en goût et en forces vitales, tel est l'objectif du jardinier et du paysan en biodynamie.

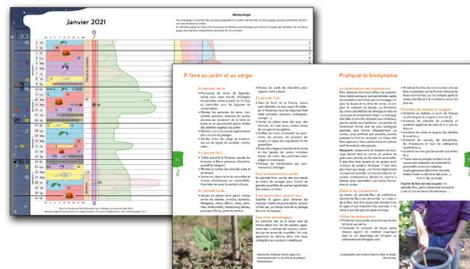
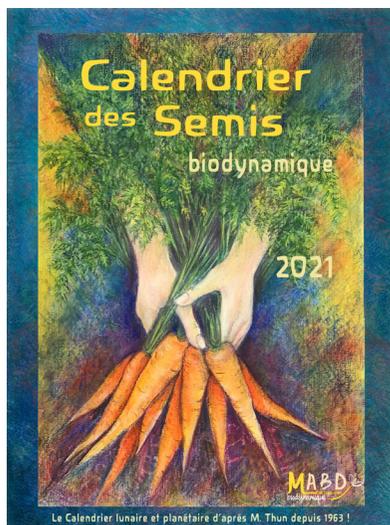
Le Calendrier des semis biodynamique, édité en France depuis plus de 30 ans est sans doute le plus complet et le plus précis. Sa présentation imagée permet une utilisation pratique très simple, mois par mois.

Il propose :

- Des indications pratiques pour les travaux de la terre au jour le jour.
- Des conseils pratiques pour appliquer la biodynamie au jardin ou sur la ferme.
- Une présentation détaillée des rythmes cosmiques avec des tableaux et cartes astronomiques permettant de connaître et visualiser exactement les positions de la Lune et des planètes.
- Des tendances météorologiques mois par mois.
- Une bibliographie et des contacts pour vous informer et vous former en biodynamie.

Prix TTC : 10€ + port / Éd. MABD 2020
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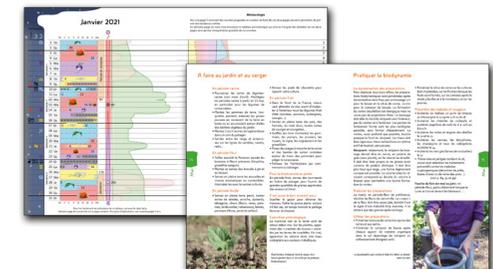
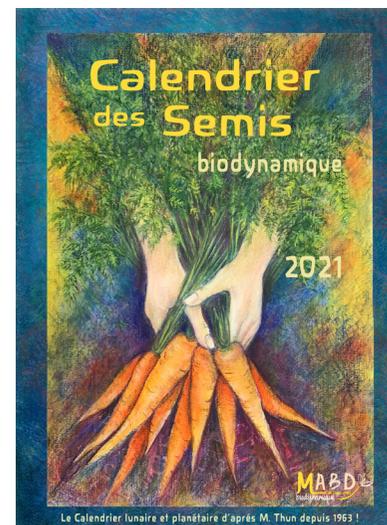
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