



Moon Harvest

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by Maria Kelly

There's a Chinese proverb that says "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

The same could be said about gardening by the moon. This ancient gardening method has endured the test of time, flourishing in cultures around the world where people have a close connection to the land and depend on growing their own produce to feed their families.

North Queensland gardeners Ray and Jean Scott, of Kuranda, say the easy method of planting to different phases of the moon produces amazing results, which could help everyone to feed themselves.

The couple have practiced lunar gardening for more than 35 years and say it makes seeds germinate faster, creating strong early growth which makes for healthier plants that produce better yields.

"Because the plants are healthier they are more resistant to disease and insect attack. We hardly have to spray our veggie garden at all, and then we only use harmless sprays like chilli and garlic," Jean says.

And while lunar gardening methods developed through the power of observation – seeing when certain plants grew better at certain phases of the moon - Jean says it is based on the moon's gravitational effect on the moisture in the plants and soil. Just as the moon influences the ebb and flow of the tides, it also affects all other water on the planet, raising and lowering the groundwater tables at various times of the month and increasing the sap flow in plants.

She explains that at different phases of the moon the gravitational pull of the sun and moon are combined to create a high sap run in plants that encourages leafy growth. At other times, such as during the waning moon, these natural forces encourage downward growth to the roots of the plants.

As a result moon gardeners divide plants into two groups. One is above ground crops, which have their edible part above the ground, such as leafy greens, tomatoes and cucumbers, and even fruit trees. The other group of plants are root crops, which have their edible part below the ground, including carrots, potatoes, beetroot and onions.

Ray and Jean say they adopted lunar gardening while growing vegetables commercially in the 1970s after a period of trial and error.

“We were having trouble with lettuce going to seed too early, which meant we couldn’t sell them, when someone told us to plant by the moon,” Jean says.

“It made such a difference, the seed germinated sooner and the lettuce weren’t bitter because they grew faster.

“Root crops were the opposite, going to seed if they were planted at the same time as the lettuce. But when we planted the beetroot at the opposite phase they were fine.”

“When your livelihood depends on a good crop you quickly learn to follow what works.”

In the late 1980s Ray and Jean started a plant nursery at Clifton Beach near Cairns and used the moon planting techniques for growing shrubs and flowers.

“The change in the sap flow of plants like dieffenbachia was obvious, with a much better strike rate for cuttings taken when there’s more sap in the plants,” Jean said.

“We’ve also noticed it often rains at the start of a growing period, softening the ground and taking some of the stress off new plants.”

The couple has turned their knowledge into a perpetual moon gardening calendar to help others enjoy the benefits of gardening by the moon.

The calendar provides easy-to-follow directions on the right time to plant and take cuttings, when to fertilise, the best time for pruning and grafting, when to cultivate and even when to fish. It divides the 28-day lunar cycle into six periods of various lengths for different activities which can be adjusted to any month you’re ready to start gardening, anywhere in the world.

“What makes this calendar different from annual moon planting guides is that you just reset it each month, so you can use it year after year,” Jean said.

“In this way people get to know the method behind the planting times, so it lasts a lifetime.

“It sets up a monthly routine which ensures different jobs are done at the optimum time, saving time and money. If you put liquid fertiliser on during the growing time the plants will use it straight away so it won’t be wasted.”

For more information visit www.moongardeningcalendar.com or phone (07) 4093 9490.

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