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## County Agent's Notes: Farming and Gardening by the Moon? - January 9, 2001

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County Agent's Notes:

January 9, 2001

Farming and Gardening by the Moon?

By: Dr. Ernie Flint, Area Agent/Agriculture

Many of my colleagues in academia may wince when they find that I have written something that is not based in current "scientific" thinking, but then it's not the first time I've "colored outside the lines" so to speak. I grew up with this stuff, listening while older people discussed the advantages and disadvantages of doing many farm-related tasks under this or that sign or stage of the moon. The finer points of the art did not stick in my youthful mind, but after studying the "science" of agriculture for more years than a few I am still curious about these principles that our forebears followed so faithfully.

The basic idea of is that the moon's gravitational forces have a significant role in controlling many earthly processes, from the rising and falling of ocean tides to the flow of water and nutrients in plants. Many past and present gardeners believe that the moon in its monthly journey around the earth influences the growth of plants and many other things relative to agriculture.

For example, by this system above-ground crops should be planted when the moon is "waxing" which is the period from new moon until full moon. It is believed that during this time plant sap has a tendency to flow upward in reaction to the gravitational pull of the moon. As you might expect then, below-ground or root crops should be planted during the "waning" of the moon, the period during which it is diminishing in the night sky, since sap tends to move

downward while the gravitational pull of the moon is decreasing. Proponents also believe that all planting should be avoided during the latest stages of the moon, from third quarter until the new moon, since emerging seedlings will be at a disadvantage without help from the gravitational force of the moon. Moon stages which are not beneficial for plant growth are put to good use in destroying weeds since they are less likely to regrow when cut down during these times.

The system gets more complicated. Superimposed over the more simple idea of moon stage are the astrological “Signs of the Zodiac.” Although there may be some rationale which can assign physical laws to these periods, I will not attempt this. These signs are provided in publications called “almanacs” such as the well-known Old Farmer’s Almanac. This is the nation’s oldest continuously published periodical, first produced by Robert B. Thomas in 1792, during George Washington’s second term as president. Today the almanac is not only published on paper but it is available on the worldwide web. The signs are also found on many calendars, but very few people my age and younger understand their meaning.

The astrological system can be simplified somewhat for gardening and farming. The signs that favor planting include Cancer which is the best, Scorpio, and Pisces; plus Taurus and Capricorn are good for planting root crops like potatoes. Libra is good for planting flowers and vines, and for planting hay crops where seed production is not needed. Sagittarius is good for planting onions and related plants. Signs that are good for destroying weeds and pests include Leo, the best for these purposes, Aries, Gemini, Virgo, and Aquarius. The signs are used to indicate good and bad times for other things such as when to go fishing, get a haircut, go to the dentist, start a diet, stop smoking, cut trees, prune, graft, wean young animals, cut hay, and many others.

As you might imagine, all this started in a time when people lived much simpler than we do today. Most of us have to attempt our everyday tasks as time is available. However, sometimes I find myself saying, “ This was the wrong day to do this.” Is it possible that Robert B. Thomas was right?