The sun and moon rise in the east and set in the west. They always occupy the same section of the sky; you'll never see them in the north. From our latitude, the sun and moon live in the southern sky between 30° and 72° above the southern horizon. All of the visible planets live in this part of the sky, too. When the sun and the moon block one another, it's called an eclipse. So they call this part of the sky the ecliptic. Twelve constellations are also visible in the ecliptic (at night). Most of them are depicted as animals, so they're called the zodiac, which means "circle of animals." At any given time the sun, moon and the planets are each in front of one another of these 12 constellations.

For example, on January 6, 2009, the sun is in front of the constellation Sagittarius and the moon is in front of Pisces. We also have Mercury in Capricorn and Saturn in Leo. So on this night, January 6, 2009, you'll see Mercury and Jupiter just above the setting sun and Venus is higher in the sky. Saturn won't rise until midnight and Mars is to close to the sun to be visible. Each of the 12 zodiac signs also represent a part of the human body, with Aries the head down to Pisces the feet. Some of the signs are called barren- Aries, Gemini, Leo, Sagittarius and Aquarius. Some are called fruitful- Taurus, Cancer, Scorpio, Capricorn and Pisces. Two are considered neutral- Virgo and Libra. Farmers and gardeners who "plant by the signs" are referring to which sign the moon is in. Jan. 6th is a good day to plant because the moon is in Pisces. But the sun rules; we have to wait until spring comes. Cancer and Scorpio are regarded as the two best signs to plant in.

The moon is in Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo or Libra it is called a descending moon. This is when the sap runs downward and is a good time for planting and fertilizing. Taurus is high in the sky, and Libra is low. As the moon moves from Scorpio back to Aries, it is an ascending moon and the sap runs upward. This is when we cut brush, harvest crops and prune fruit trees. The moon takes a month to go through the zodiac, just as the sun takes a year.

Another more apparent change in the sky is the monthly cycle of moon phases. Above ground crops are planted as the moon goes from full new moon to full moon, and root crops are planted from full to new moon periods. Our potatoes keep better when harvested during the darker moon phases.

I like to look at constellations. It's hard to believe anything so far away could affect us here. Sometimes I plant by the signs, but I trust that if I plant at the wrong time my seeds will wait until the right sign comes along. Mother nature knows a lot more than I do.