

It is disheartening to see a garden with a yellowish hue, denoting a lack of nitrogen, or an abandoned, ungrazed pasture begging for manure. Nitrogen has to be available for plants to grow, but luckily it's everywhere. Air is 79% nitrogen, it is in every breath you take. Steiner has a lot to say about nitrogen. "Nitrogen not only becomes alive but sensitive inside the Earth; and this is of the greatest importance for agriculture. Nitrogen is not unconscious of that which comes from the stars and works itself out in the life of plants, in the life of Earth. Nitrogen is verily the bearer of sensation. So you can penetrate into the intimate life of Nature if you can see the nitrogen everywhere, moving about like flowing, fluctuating feelings."

In organic farming, we want our nitrogen alive, which is why we keep livestock, make compost and grow legumes. Being aware of the nitrogen flow is a large part of the art of agriculture, and apparently it has something to teach us. What can we learn from nitrogen, and how?

"If you knock against a table, you will only be conscious of your own pain. If, however, you rub against it gently, you will be conscious of the surface of the table. So it is when you meditate. By and by you grow into a conscious living experience of the nitrogen all around you. It is not all a bad thing if he who has farming to do can meditate. He thereby makes himself receptive to the revelations of nitrogen. All kinds of secrets that prevail in farm and farmyard- we suddenly begin to know them."

As we read the agriculture course, we are continually encouraged to imagine, feel, concentrate and look around us. In his other works, Steiner gives meditation practices using imaginations, feelings, concentrations and observations. We retain in ourselves a little more carbon dioxide in meditating and breathing deeply. It's not easy to just be aware of my breath, all sorts of ideas pop up in my head. I like to look at a seed and picture the plant, or look at an older plant and see the future new plant, or imagine a growing plant and how it is different from a stone, animal or human.

"For when you mediate you live quite differently with the nitrogen which contains the Imaginations. You thereby put yourself in a position which will enable all these things to be effective; you put yourself in this position over against the whole world of plant-growth. For there were times when people knew that by certain definite practices they could make themselves fitted to tend the growth of plants."

The agriculture course contains certain definite practices. Steiner prefaced the compost preparations by emphasizing that we must provide for oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen and sulfur to come together in the right way with other substances, notably with the potash salts. Potash is oxygen and potassium, which is a cation like calcium and magnesium. Yarrow was chosen for its quality of potassium, chamomile for its calcium, and both for their relationship with sulfur.

Plant growth thrives when the cations are within this specific ratio: Calcium 64-72%, magnesium 16-18%, and potassium 4-5%. This ratio encourages life in the soil. Rain and air provide much of a plant's requirements for O,C,H,N and S, but we must provide the cations ourselves. We get potassium from wood ashes and granite meal, and calcium and magnesium from lime. The minerals, like the manure, must be present for the magic to happen.