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Planting crops by the moon can go in phases

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Except for a great-grandfather from Wiltshire, England, who supplied the family name, the rest of the family had emigrated from the Palatinate in Germany prior to 1800 and thus was solidly "Pennsilfaanisch Deitsche," or Pennsylvania German.

My father spoke dialect but refused to teach me. "They'll make fun of you," was his response to my requests, so I only remember a few words and sentence fragments today. In the 1950s, Pennsylvania Germans were considered hicks and backward, and the language and traditions were often suppressed, so he was certainly right in that respect.

Until recently, I never realized how many Pennsylvania German traditions, such as Braucherei, ruled my father's daily life. Braucherei, sometimes called powwow-ing, has been called a "magico-religious folk medical" tradition, but that definition is very incomplete.

In Southeastern Pennsylvania, Braucherei, the practitioners of Braucherei, were once as common as Christian churches and served as channels or teachers of the Holy Spirit. Lurid stories have tried to equate Braucherei with witchcraft or Voodoo, but Brauchers, being in the service of God, tried to serve their communities in

Garden Tales

folk medicine, calming of ghosts, helping spirits cross over, etc.

My father did everything in threes, a common practice of Braucherei. He bought things in threes, planted in threes, etc. Most fruit trees (except sour cherries) are self-incompatible, that is, they cannot fertilize themselves, so we had good fruit set because dad planted three varieties each of apples, pears, sweet cherries, peaches and apricots.

Another tradition of Braucherei that my father practiced comes to mind every spring: planting by the phases of the moon. The basic idea is that, just as the moon influences tides, it also influences the water relations in the plant. In the simplest version, plant leafy crops in the full moon and root crops in the dark of the moon.

This tradition is also interpreted in terms of the four phases of the moon. In the new moon, the lunar gravity supposedly causes the seeds to swell to produce balanced root and leaf growth. This is the time to plant annual leafy crops, such as lettuce, spinach, celery, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and grains.

In the second quarter, the lunar gravity is less, so strong leaf growth is encouraged.



Submitted photo/Angel Tucker

In planting by the phases of the moon, plant root crops, such as the Chantenay carrots shown here, during the waning of the full moon.

This is the time to plant fruiting annual crops, such as beans, melons, peas, peppers, squash and tomatoes. After the full

moon, energy wanes, and this becomes a time to plant root crops, such as beets, carrots, onions, potatoes, and peanuts. At the fourth quarter, with a decreased gravitational pull, this is a resting period, a time to cultivate, harvest, transplant, prune and mow lawns.

There are many Web sites on planting by the phases of the moon. However, be reminded that there is no good, solid science to support this folk practice. On the other hand, a paper from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in the April 16, 1998, issue of the journal *Nature* reported that tree stem diameters fluctuate with the tide.

Whether planting by the phases of the moon is true or not, just like dowsing for water, this ancient European tradition has survived in today's folklore. As for me, I put more faith in the "magic" of good compost and adequate watering.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.