

*Book Review*

# **Don't judge biodynamics by this book**

## **Biodynamic Greenhouse Management**

by Heinz Grotzke

published by the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association Inc.

P. O. Box 550, Kimberton, PA, 19442, USA

1990, paperback, \$12.00 U.S., ISBN 0-938250-25~.

*Reviewed by David Wees, Department of Plant Science Macdonald Campus of McGill University*

The biodynamic movement was founded in Europe in 1924. It has since spread to North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. Biodynamic farming is a specialized form of organic agriculture that emphasizes the spiritual relationships between humans and their environment and the natural big-rhythms of plants and animals.

Heinz Grotzke has been involved with biodynamics since the 1950's and has grown greenhouse herbs in Rhode Island since the 1960's. In his book, Grotzke attempts to explain a few aspects of greenhouse management. He also discusses a few points on the Biodynamic approach to plants. The book includes a chapter on soils, water, light, biodynamic preparations, insects and diseases. Six of the 17 chapters appeared previously in issues of Biodynamics magazine.

There are, unfortunately, many problems with the book. Very little is offered in the way of guidelines, principles or recommendations in greenhouse design and maintenance, fertilization or crop scheduling even though the introduction. Much of the information is applicable only in hobby greenhouses. There are few diagrams of greenhouse structures. There is almost no discussion of "modern" equipment: the author seems thrilled that a thermostat (a requisite for any serious operation) could control greenhouse heating and cooling. His diagrams of "specially designed" tomato and cucumber greenhouses show structures that are much too low: 4-6 feet at the gutter or trough, whereas they should be 10-12 feet high.

There are also a few glaring errors, such as stating that tomato pollen travels through the air: tomatoes are in fact self-pollinated.

The authors' approach to pest control is ambiguous. On one hand he uses nicotine sulfate, a violent poison and on the other, he rejects biological control because of one ill fated (and ill-conceived) personal experience.

Finally, the most annoying problem with the text is the author's writing style. He tries to be elegant, eloquent and poetic ('wherever we look, plants abound with beauty, created by the purity of substances' (p. 13), whatever that means) but only succeeds in being redundant and vague ("lavender needs a higher pH" (p.27): how high is higher?). There is so much repetition and vagueness that a competent editor could reduce the length of this already short book by half.

To conclude, a Biodynamic grower who wants an introduction to the greenhouse business should forget this book and buy a standard text on greenhouses. A greenhouse operator who is interested in biodynamics should also forget the book and buy an introductory text on biodynamics. In short, I do not recommend this book.

Copyright © 1991 *REAP Canada*