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Hugh J. Courtney

How to Make the Oak Bark Preparation (BD #505)

What would seem to be one of the most straightforward to make of all the preparations, the BD #505 is simply described by Steiner as placing chopped up oak bark in the skull of a domestic animal. The failure to give proper and thorough attention to the making of this preparation is perhaps the greatest reason why our biodynamic efforts have thus far had so little impact on the world's agriculture. Before speaking of the challenges in the making of this preparation (See "The Oak Bark Preparation, Organ of Living Thinking", p. 8), let me first describe in as exacting detail as possible the manner in which we make the oak bark preparation here at the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Bio-Dynamics.

Harvesting and making ready the oak bark

Starting first with the business of obtaining the oak bark, the tree of choice in our area is the white oak tree or *Quercus alba.* This is the tree in North America suggested by Ehrenfried Pfeiffer as most like the English oak or *Quercus robur,* which is the particular oak specified by Rudolf Steiner when he gave the Agriculture Course.[1] Apparently, Pfeiffer's recommendation was based on a more or less direct comparison of the characteristics of *Quercus robur* to the North American oak tree, *Quercus alba,* that shares a significant number of the same characteristics (figure 1). Such a close resemblance between these two oaks is to be seen in the following quote from *Practical Guide to Home Landscaping,* where the white oak is described as:

> A wide-spreading, slow-growing tree with handsome branch structure, a rounded crown and leaves with rounded lobes. It grows to a height of 60–90 feet. Other good oaks that share the qualities of deep roots, rounded crown, slow growth and longevity are: English oak (*Q. robur*). Like the white oak, but has smaller leaves. It grows slowly and after a few generations becomes a tree of noble size and proportion.[2]

No other oaks quite share the same characteristics. In an area where English oak or white oak cannot be found, Steiner's earlier indication[3] allows substitutes for the preparations (with the exception of stinging nettle), giving us some leeway in choosing other members of the oak family.

In our harvest of oak bark, we remove the very outermost layer of bark, never from the north side of the tree if moss is present. We look for a live, mature, healthy tree, and remove the bark from the main trunk or the largest branches

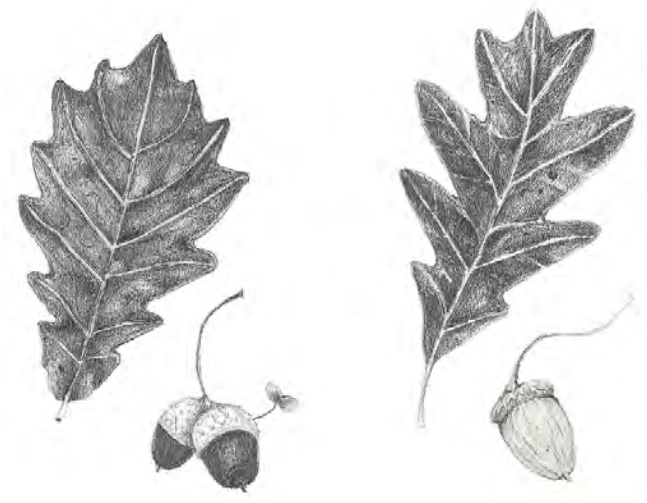

Figure 1. The similar species, English oak (Quercus robur), at left and the white oak (Quercus alba), at right are used to make the oak bark preparation (BD #505). The white oak is more commonly found in the United States while the English oak is prevalent in Europe. Illustration © Matthew Baker

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Notes

Completing a task can be an easy or difficult action depending upon how we face it in the first place. The making of the biodynamic preparations is a prime example of this. Some people would rather buy the biodynamic preparations than make them. The reasons are many for this situation: not having access to the sheaths or plant materials, time constraints, the lack of a local biodynamic network of support, or simply, the convenience of a dependable product to purchase, to name a few. For those who have been able to make some or all of the biodynamic preparations, they have learned it's not that big a deal in the method, it's just of matter of getting the work done.

As our world becomes more processed, more homogenized, more rapidly paced, we can easily fall into the trap of being part of the worldwide rat race, rather than a member of humanity doing our part to make the earth a little healthier with the use of the biodynamic preparations. Before we descend into a numbing mindset of, "I can't", we really need to ask, "Why not", to at least give prep making a try. We owe it to Rudolf Steiner and to all those biodynamic pioneers from the last century to bring the best agricultural and horticultural efforts forward, without compromise or ego.

Now please don't feel guilty for those of you who haven't gotten around to making some of the biodynamic preparations for yourself. That is not the intention here, but to keep alive the thought that you too can make them if you choose to do so. By walking you through the steps in biodynamic preparation making, we hope to bring you a closer understanding of what goes into their making, as well as the relationship they hold to earth's healing.

To this end, one of the more sensitive preps to work with, the oak bark preparation (BD #505) is featured in this issue. Hugh Courtney's articles on this preparation, its making, uses and history offer the reader an opportunity to understand this compost preparation in greater detail, which it certainly deserves.

For those of you who will be involved in fall preparation making activities at this time, may this be a continuing and rewarding process for you and those with whom you share in the experience.

Patricia Smith, Editor

2004 Calendars Available

The Stella Natura 2004 Biodynamic Agricultural Calendar is now available at JPI for $13.95 plus postage and handling. The theme of the calendar is water.

Applied Biodynamics

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Mission

The Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Bio-Dynamics Inc. (JPI), was founded to produce quality biodynamic agricultural preparations based on the spiritual-scientific research of Rudolf Steiner.

It serves as a living memorial to Josephine Porter, a pioneer for this work in America.

The mission of JPI also includes education and research in biodynamic agriculture. JPI undertakes these tasks so that the earth may be healed.

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How To Make The Oak Bark Preparation (BD #505)

Figure 2. Using a hive tool, the outer most layer of bark is harvested from a white oak (Quercus alba). Photo © Patricia Smith

if accessible. The tool of choice is a beekeepers hive tool or a short handled hoe (figure 2), which can be pulled down against the bark to loosen it. Never do we want to penetrate as deeply as the cambium layer. Usually a cardboard box which has had the bottom carefully sealed with tape is held just underneath the area which one is scraping with the hive tool. Alternatively, especially when harvesting a large tree, a sheet or cloth can be spread below the area where one is scraping the bark, with the bark collecting on the cloth. For the most part, a cardboard box is preferred, since it can be held closely beneath the site where one is using the hive tool, and the side of the box can be bent or shaped somewhat to conform to the curvature of the tree. When sufficient bark has been collected, we then grind it in an old corn meal grinder for small quantities or a grain grinder when dealing with a large quantity (figures 3 and 4). My mentor, Josephine Porter used an old hand meat grinder when she first taught me to make this preparation. Such equipment can often be found at farm auctions when kitchen items are included.

Figure 3. A small corn meal grinder can be used to process small quantities of oak bark. Photo © Patricia Smith

Figure 4. For greater amounts of harvested oak bark, a large capacity grain grinder can complete the job. Photo © Patricia Smith

At the completion of the grinding process, we are seeking a consistency of ground oak bark that is approximately the fineness of builders sand used for mixing mortar.

To further prepare the oak bark for placement in the skull, we brew a tea in a large pot with several larger chunks of oak bark that has not been ground. A significant quantity of oak bark tea will be needed, since the ground oak bark seems to have an enormous capacity to absorb water. We want to make a good strong tea that may need to simmer for an hour or more in order to extract the soluble substances from the oak bark. Before actually moistening the oak bark, we also want to make sure that the tea has cooled enough so that we do not scald the life force within the

If you don't have a grinder . . .

An alternative method for crushing or grinding the oak bark is suggested by Ruth Zinniker. After the bark is gathered, it is then soaked in water for a period of time sufficient to allow it to be broken up easily. After soaking, it is placed on a hard surface (concrete slab or sidewalk) and crushed with a hammer until it is well crumbled. The resultant product is rubbed through a one-quarter inch screen or sieve and the particles that will not pass through are subjected to further pounding until there is sufficient crushed oak bark to fill the skulls one intends to make.

Figure 5. Moisten the ground oak bark with the oak bark tea. Once thoroughly blended, the consistency is just right when a handful of the mixture can be squeezed without a drop of liquid being released. Photo © Patricia Smith

ground oak bark. By ensuring that the tea is pleasantly warm to the touch of a human hand, we will arrive at the optimum temperature that is needed in order to moisten the oak bark. The tea is added carefully to the ground oak bark and one is always surprised at the absorbing capacity of the bark. The optimum moisture content is achieved when a handful of the moistened material can be picked up and squeezed tightly in the hand with virtually no water droplets being exuded, yet the ground oak bark itself is completely moist with no dry pockets. At this point, the moistened oak bark is ready for insertion into the brain cavity of the skull of a domestic animal; so let us now turn to the question of the skull to be used in making this preparation.

Obtaining and making ready the skull

We usually use bovine skulls and where possible, we seek to obtain skulls from mature animals, preferably from a cow, rather than a bull. We are also able to obtain a few sheep skulls each year. Josephine Porter also used goat skulls to good effect. Our experiment with a pig skull proved to be somewhat unsatisfactory, since the slaughterhouse procedure for a pig skull involves sawing the skull and splitting the brain cavity into two separate pieces. Efforts to wire the skull back together and produce an acceptable preparation were less than successful.

The skulls we use are fresh or, at least, fresh frozen. The source from which we obtain the skulls has already removed the brain shortly after slaughter, and removes the skin from the skull as well. Since we sometimes put down as many as sixty skulls at a time, we have the forepart of the head sawn

Figure 6. The untrimmed cow skull is placed in a barrel before being covered by moistened sawdust. Photo © Patricia Smith

Barrel Method Using Sawdust

We are also experimenting with another procedure where the brain cavity is stuffed with the oak bark without trimming. The now stuffed but untrimmed skull is then exposed to flies, which lay their eggs in the still untrimmed fleshy parts. After a day or so of such exposure, the skull is placed in a barrel filled with well-moistened sawdust (figure 6). After a fairly lengthy time, often many weeks later, the skull is removed from the barrel, and if the fly maggots have done their job, the flesh and eyes should have been consumed. The entire time that the skulls are residing in the barrel, one needs to ensure that fresh rainwater is added to the barrel periodically. To date, we have not been completely satisfied with this technique, especially when dealing with a large number of skulls, but we intend to experiment further with it.

Figure 7. By controlling the amount of water pressure, this homemade tool of copper tubing and a hose fitting with shut-off valve, is used for flushing out the brain material and leaving the membrane lining of the skull intact. This type of tool is also used in slaughterhouses for the same purpose. Illustration © Matthew Baker

off as well, so that the site where the skulls are buried does not have to be enlarged so as to accommodate skulls with a full snout on them. The saw cut is usually made ahead of the eyes, but behind the innermost teeth, and the lower jawbone is also sawn off close to the hinge at the base of the skull. When we receive the skull, there is still a considerable amount of flesh and fat as well as the eyes, all of which we prefer to remove before we actually stuff the oak bark into the brain cavity. (See sidebar on previous page for another approach.)

For our own animals, when we do an on-farm slaughter, we use a special tool to remove the brain from the cavity (figure 7). This tool consists of a length of copper tubing (one-quarter inch diameter), which has been soldered to a hose fitting which includes a shut-off valve. When removing the brain, the tool is affixed to the end of a water hose, the tube is inserted into the brain cavity, and the valve is turned on. The brain is then flushed out of the cavity by the high pressure of the water, but the membrane lining the skull cavity is not damaged by the brief exposure to the water. When we are dealing with frozen skulls, we employ this tool again when the skull has thawed in order to ensure that all of the brain matter is out of the skull cavity. This is the same tool and technique used in the slaughterhouse for removing the brain from the skulls. In the case of the skull from our own farm slaughter, we proceed to completely remove the jawbone rather than sawing it off close to the skull as the slaughterhouse does.

Stuffing the brain cavity

Once the skulls are ready for stuffing, we take the moistened oak bark, and initially, at least, with the help of a small funnel with a wide opening, we begin to insert the oak bark into the brain cavity through the *foramen magnum,* the opening at the base of the skull. We try to pack the moistened oak bark as tightly into the cavity as we possibly can, using a dowel to help with the packing. When we believe the skull is fully packed, it is placed in a tub of water. If properly and tightly packed, the skull should sink, or barely float. If the skull floats high out of the water, one should redouble the effort to pack it even more tightly, because there is a very great likelihood that there is either an air pocket, or worse, some brain tissue still remaining within the skull cavity. When the skulls are all fully packed, the *foramen magnum* opening is sealed with clay, and if possible, a piece of bone cut to fit the opening. When dealing with forty or fifty skulls, or even a dozen, it is sometimes quite difficult to find enough bone pieces to use for this step.

Choosing the site to bury the skulls

If one does not use the rain barrel technique suggested by Steiner,[4] then a choice of a low swamp-like spot preferably isolated from any other ponds or waterways could be utilized. It should also be a spot where rainwater flows or collects. The main site we have chosen has proved to be a very good one over the years (figure 8). We generally make and bury the preparation in the fall of the year after Michaelmas (September 29), but before Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday in November). After the skulls are placed in the pit, we make sure that rainwater can be channeled into it, and we cover the skulls with a combination of mud and vegetable matter, mostly leaves from the forest floor around the pit, since it is much handier than would be the case were we to use

Figure 8. A narrow path of rainwater trickling through a shallow gully makes for a suitable site for burying the 505 in the fall. Photo © Patricia Smith

peat moss, as Steiner suggests.[5] In order to prevent stray dogs or a fox from digging up the skulls, we cover the site with a piece of woven wire fencing, which is then staked down at the edges with metal stakes. Large rocks, or pieces of metal pipe, or old metal fence posts are also placed over the fencing to hold it down in place to thwart any animals seeking to dig anything up. Josephine Porter chose to encircle her oak bark pit site with a woven wire fence requiring several wooden posts. Failure to protect the site can lead to a major loss when it comes to recovering the preparation.

Recovering the oak bark preparation

When it comes to digging up the preparation, the time of excavation would normally be somewhere between Easter and St. John's Day (June 24), with a time at or after Ascension Day (forty days after Easter) preferred. However, because we have for the last several years conducted seminars here at JPI in preparation making, we have chosen to delay the digging up of this preparation until the time of our Fall Seminar (usually the third week of October) so that the participants can experience both the finished preparation and the making of it as well. In other words, they can experience the preparation from start to finish. Such a delay does not seem to diminish the potency of the oak bark preparation.

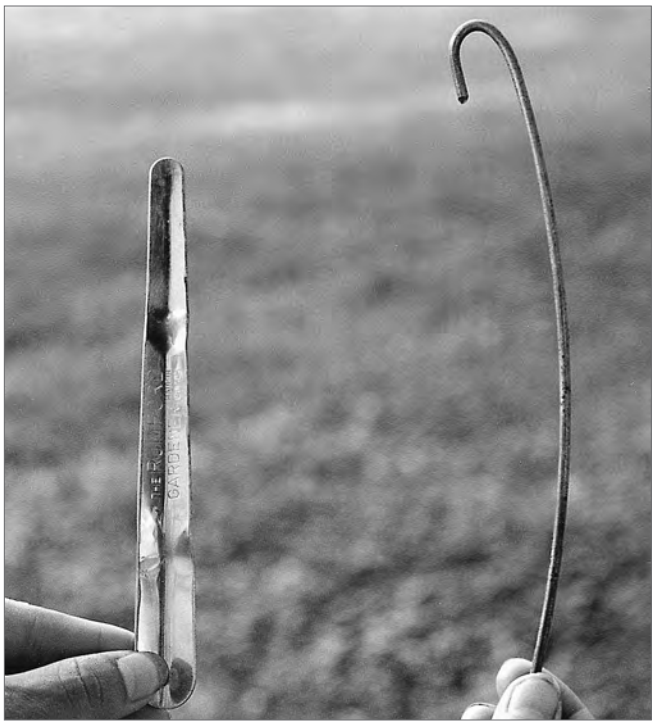

Figure 10. The tools to remove the finished oak bark from the skull cavity are a 'nit-picker' at left and a stiff wire hook at right. Photo © Patricia Smith

Figure 9. Once excavated, the skull is gently hosed down to remove mud and debris and is left to dry for a few days. After drying, further removal of fine grit and sand is removed from the skull and around the opening with a bristle brush before attempting to empty the finished oak bark preparation within the skull. Photo © Patricia Smith

After the skulls are dug up from the pit, they are all carefully hosed off, so that we can avoid contaminating the finished preparation with the debris from the mud and vegetation. The finished preparation is then carefully removed from the brain cavity using a 'nit-picker' or a piece of stiff wire that has had a hook bent into one end of it (figure 10). The finished preparation is carefully emptied into a bowl or other container (figure 11). When sufficient material has been removed from the skull cavity, and there is still oak bark that cannot be reached with whatever tool we are

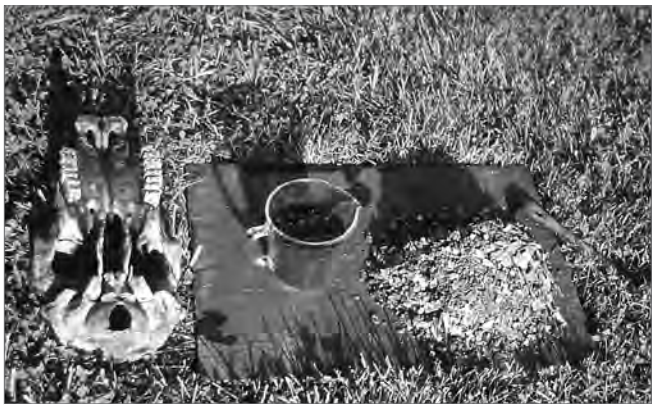

Figure 11. Emptying the finished oak bark from a skull at left yields about one cup of finished preparation. At right is debris that was cleaned from the skull. Photo © JPI Staff

using, we then turn the skull over and tap the back of it vigorously with a hammer so that the remaining oak bark is loosened and exits through the *foramen magnum* into a container. When all the skulls have been emptied, the preparation is screened through one-eighth inch mesh hardware cloth so as to remove any foreign matter such as bits of skull membrane, bone, stones, soil, vegetation, etc. We will often find earthworms of a most peculiar nature (see description on p. 8), which we also remove. The finished preparation is then placed in a fifteen-gallon crock in our root cellar, and is ready for use.

Notes

1) Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture* (Kimberton, PA: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1993), 111.
2) *Reader's Digest Practical Guide to Home Landscaping,* (Pleasantville, NY: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1989), 214.
3) Steiner, 93.
4) Ibid., 101.
5) Ibid.

Contributing illustrator Matthew Baker is a full-time staff member at JPI.

Hugh J. Courtney

Using the Oak Bark Preparation

Our volumetric measure for a unit of oak bark is a rounded teaspoon, which is about 2.5 to 3 grams by weight. Since most farmers and gardeners do not have a scale in grams ready to hand, we use the volume measure as more convenient for JPI's clients. This quantity, along with the other five compost preparations is sufficient to treat ten to fifteen tons of compost material. When one builds the initial compost pile on a site, the recommendation is to calculate one set for each ten tons of material. As subsequent compost piles are built on the same site, the ratio of compost sets to the material can be adjusted until one set treats as much as fifteen tons of material. For those who calculate compost material by the cubic yard, the conversion factor is one and one-third cubic yards (a cube 4' x 4' x 4') equals one ton.

For use by itself, the oak bark preparation can be employed on soils where the calcium levels are too low, but it is probable that repeat applications would be required in order to significantly affect available calcium levels. As a prophylactic measure against plant diseases, a separate application of the oak bark preparation should also be considered before planting out any crops. For use as a seed bath, the oak bark preparation is extremely beneficial for oats, bush beans, and especially lettuces. Germination is much faster, and the overall health of crops is improved.

Other uses for this preparation would suggest themselves by focusing on what Steiner has to say about its purposes. In introducing this preparation, he speaks of it as a universal remedy against plant diseases.[1] He also speaks of the need to bring calcium that remains within the realm of the living to the soil.[2] Such calcium in a living state has the ability to restore "order when the ether body is working too strongly"[3] and thereby prevents the astral from gaining "access to the organic entity."[4] Calcium in this form "damps down the ether-body, and thereby makes free the influences of the astral body."[5] By thinking through such descriptions, we may conclude that in a very wet season, when there is quite prolific or "rampant" growth, a separate application of the oak bark preparation might tame such growth and allow the fruiting and flowering process to proceed in a more normal fashion.

One anecdotal experience from a gardener in Pennsylvania involved using the oak bark preparation in combination with the stinging nettle preparation (BD #504) as a "watering in" treatment for tomato plants to restore the leaf growth of those plants when they had been over-stimulated towards flowering and fruiting by repeated diligent applications of the silica (BD #501) and valerian (BD #507) preparations. These applications of 501 and 507 did improve the fruiting, but it left the tomato plants almost barren of leaves and considerably less photogenic than was needed for a newspaper photo shoot that was scheduled within the following two weeks. In another observation, the same combination of oak bark and stinging nettle also seemed to have a modest ability to thwart frost damage when it was used late in the fall of the year to water in pepper plants.

For separate application of the oak bark preparation as a soil or plant spray, a stirring time of one hour is preferred, although for small areas or for seed baths, one may consider a potentization in an apple cider jug which is shaken in a lemniscate motion (see Issue No. 28 of *Applied Biodynamics* for a more detailed description of this process). Above all, we strongly encourage you to experiment with the use of this

preparation on its own and to share the results of those experiments with the readership of *Applied Biodynamics.*

Notes

1) Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture* (Kimberton, PA: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1993), 100.
2) Ibid., 101.
3) Rudolf Steiner, *Agriculture* (London: Biodynamic Agricultural Association, 1984), 97.
4) Ibid.
5) Ibid.

Hugh J. Courtney

The Oak Bark Preparation, Organ of Living Thinking (In the Farm Organism)

Steiner specifies merely the skull of a domestic animal[1] as the sheath for the oak bark preparation. Indeed, he does not even define for us what a domestic animal is, and at times strangely enough, the question has come up from the literalists amongst us regarding the suitability of a dog or a cat skull, since they too, are generally regarded as domestic animals. Lilly Kolisko seems to suggest[2] that using the skull of a horse might yield a poorer end product. It has been suggested that in a certain sense, the cat, dog and horse are somewhat too close to the human being and should be avoided. In order of availability and my own personal preference, I would rank the choice as follows: cow, steer, heifer and bull amongst the bovine species; then sheep, goat and pig in that order, with both sheep and goat preferred over a bovine bull skull. We have had so little opportunity as far as using a pig skull that we can offer no firm opinion as to its suitability. While we have experimented with using a buffalo (American bison) cow skull, since it is generally not regarded as a domestic animal, the resultant oak bark has not been subsequently used and awaits the leisure of future experimentation. No opportunity has presented itself to try more exotic animals such as llama, alpaca, or water buffalo.

The most important single factor in using any skull is to ensure that it is as fresh as possible, so that the membrane lining the skull cavity, the *meninges* (figure 12), is intact. In a certain sense, the true sheath for the oak bark is not the skull, but rather the *meninges.* The practice of using a desiccated skull, either by placing the freshly slaughtered skull in a compost pile or in the crotch of a tree for several weeks or months, can only lead to a finished preparation of highly questionable quality, and ranks very high as a shortcoming in our making of this preparation. To remain within the realm of the living as Steiner encourages us to do[3] can only be accomplished for this preparation by preserving the true sheath of the *meninges* membrane which lines the brain cavity. If we are too finicky or averse to using a somewhat gory fresh skull because we don't want to have to deal with something quite that messy, and allow a compost pile or the weathering of nature to clean up the skull for us, then in all likelihood, the *meninges* will have also been cleaned up as well. We must not allow our sentimentality or aversion to the unpleasantness of the task to deter us from making a vital and useable preparation. I would venture to say that over the years, quite a lot of substandard oak bark preparation has been produced. By so doing, we have not brought to our biodynamic practice the genuine disease countering forces that Steiner offered when he described this preparation.[4] I would have to say that if a practitioner can't get over their concerns and objections to using a fresh skull, then they should not claim to be a maker of the biodynamic preparations. They are instead a mere dilettante just going through the motions. There have been some who have presented as an excuse for using a desiccated skull the fact that the end product when using a fresh skull had a very rank and objectionable odor. My response to anyone who ends up with a rotten smell when they empty out an oak bark skull is that they most likely had neglected to remove all of the brain tissue when they first prepared the skull for making the preparation. If one is thorough and not sloppy in their preparation making, they will be a lot further ahead.

One of the most remarkable results I have experienced since ensuring that only fresh skulls are used is the appearance of a most unusual earthworm. At times, when emptying a skull, one will find neatly coiled, a very long earthworm, which is as thin as the wire of a paperclip (figure 13). When one first sees such an earthworm all coiled up in a neat spiral, one is immediately struck by its incredible resemblance to brain tissue. The next question one asks is how

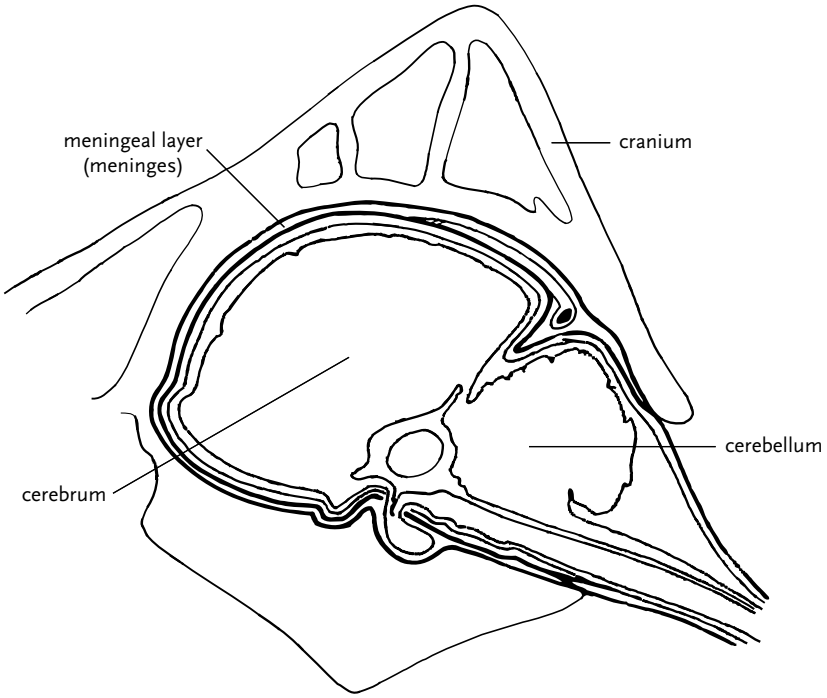

Figure 12. The membrane lining within the skull, the meninges, surrounds the cerebrum and cerebellum. Original illustration prior to modification: Chris Pasquini, D.V.M., Atlas of Bovine Anatomy, (Sudz Publishing: Eureka, CA, 1982), 86.

in the world did such a worm find its way into the middle of a skull full of oak bark that has been sitting in a watery swamp-like pit, since earthworms otherwise seem averse to water soaked soils? An additional part of the mystery concerns what happens to the oak bark after we have processed it and placed it in storage. Even though we endeavor to remove all earthworms before it is stored, it is only a matter of a few weeks before the oak bark preparation in the storage crock becomes saturated with the little red BD worms. No further evidence of the very long thin worms that were found upon emptying the skulls is to be seen. Again, before we ship out the finished oak bark to fill an order for the compost preparations, we take some additional time to remove these earthworms. I have not yet met any preparation makers who have experienced this same abundance of earthworms or the peculiar long thin worm described above. I believe the earthworms of whatever kind will only be present if one is using a fresh skull.

Figure 13. Many thread-like earthworms such as this are found in the finished oak bark preparation at JPI. Photo © Patricia Smith

Doubts have also been voiced recently concerning the practice of harvesting oak bark,[5] with the suggestion that the outermost layer of bark is not what should be harvested, but rather bark next to the cambium layer, and from younger trees and limbs in the spring of the year as was/is the recommended practice when using oak bark for human or animal medicaments. To address these doubts requires a certain historical perspective, as well as a genuine look at what Steiner is seeking to have us create in this preparation.

When the biodynamic preparations first began to be experimented with, even before Steiner gave the Agriculture lectures, several people were involved in carrying out his instructions. Among those people were Lilly Kolisko, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Günther Wachsmuth and Immanuel Voegele. My instructions for making the oak bark came from my mentor, Josephine Porter, who learned her preparation making from Pfeiffer. She was most specific when teaching me to harvest the bark from the white oak tree, that the outermost layers, especially not involving the cambium layer, were the proper choice for harvesting for this preparation.

Figure 14. The bark of a white oak (Quercus alba). Photo © Patricia Smith

Figure 15. Harvesting oak bark. Photo © JPI Staff

Likewise, in my recent conversations with Ruth Zinniker, who learned her preparation making from her father, Immanuel Voegele, confirmed that she too was taught to harvest the outer most layers of the oak bark, in her case from *Quercus robur,* the English, or as it is sometimes referred to in Europe, the common oak. Since we both received explicit instruction from people either directly connected with Steiner, or only one person removed, I think it is important to approach a different understanding of just why one would use this particular bark, rather than approaching the oak bark harvest with the same mindset as though one were harvesting to make a medicament for humans or animals. We should not presume that the biodynamic world has been harvesting the wrong kind of bark all these years simply because this differs from the way one harvests this substance for making a medicament.

In the first place, to draw an analogy from the steps used in making medicaments for human or even animal use, is to make an assumption without really examining what Steiner is seeking for us to achieve with the oak bark preparation. Of the several preparation plants, all of them have been used as medicaments for long periods of human history. However, it is of more than passing interest that Steiner actually recommends in more than one instance, parts of these plants that are not normally used in making remedies for treating humans and animals. In the case of valerian, Steiner suggests the flowers for use in making an agricultural preparation, when for humans the recommended part of the plant is the root. This is true as well for the dandelion where it is the flower we seek for biodynamic application rather than the root, which is the choice when dealing with human remedies. In a reference from my reading of Steiner, I experienced a moment of awareness and recognition when he refers to the bark production of a tree as a kind of "flowering process." Unfortunately I cannot cite that reference for the reader's confirmation, and I do not have the leisure to re-read the several lecture series in which I may have seen such a statement. By recognizing that the outermost layer of oak bark is of the force or nature of a flower (tending towards seed?),[6] all of the compost preparation plants, including stinging nettle, are thereby to be seen as encompassing this flowering process. It is at the flowering stage that the astral most closely approaches the plant.[7] Is it perhaps the bark of a tree that ensures the hovering astrality that Steiner refers to in the Agriculture Course?[8]

When Steiner gave the indication for the oak bark preparation, the goal was to have a substance so treated that it had the capability of damping down the etheric.[9] Such capability comes about by stimulating a strong astral energy. Within the nerves-senses organism of the human being, the astral dominates as well. It is within that nerves-senses pole that Steiner speaks of the need for a state of nearly deathlike existence for the nerve cells, in order to bring about the possibility of human thinking. In order to create an organ of thinking, as it were, for the compost pile, and ultimately for the earth and soil treated with that compost, Steiner suggests for us a substance so closely approaching a state of deadness, that it can be seen as the nearest still living substance within the plant kingdom which is akin to the brain cells. This substance, the outermost layer or rind of bark from the oak tree, is then placed within the *meninges* sheath guarded by the skull of a domestic animal. The subsequent burial in a watery pit during the winter months when the Earth is most inwardly alive is what allows the creation of a brain-like organ for first the compost, and then the soil. Just as the brain is surrounded by the fluid in which it is floating, so too does a watery earthy fluid surround the oak bark within the *meninges*

which resides inside the skull. It is only this step of creating an organ of thinking, or consciousness, added to the other organs created by the several compost preparations that allows the possibility for a farm organism to develop and to become an individuality. It is only when a farm individuality or a farm ego can manifest that we achieve the purpose of the biodynamic preparations "so that the earth may be healed."[10]

Notes

1) Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture* (Kimberton, PA: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1993), 101.
2) Lilly Kolisko, *Agriculture of Tomorrow* (Bournemouth, England: Kolisko Archive Publications, 1978), 183.
3) Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture,* 101.
4) Ibid., 100.
5) Malcolm Gardner, "Are We Collecting the Best Oak Bark?", *BIODYNAMICS* #241 (2002): 3–10.
6) Rudolf Steiner, *Agriculture* (London: Biodynamic Agricultural Association, 1984), 92.
7) Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture,* 52, 153.
8) Ibid., 144.
9) Rudolf Steiner, *Agriculture,* 97.
10) Ibid., 7.

König's Observations

So that you may perceive that I am not alone in my conclusions, Karl König in the very valuable book *Earth and Man* (Wyoming, RI: Biodynamic Literature, 1982) uses the following words when he examines this oak bark preparation:

> . . . the oak bark preparation, placed into the compost heap, makes the compost heap not only sensible but conscious, which is much more. . . . What makes the animal conscious, gives to man conscience and not merely consciousness. The same powers give a plant health. A healthy plant is healthy by virtue of the same powers which create consciousness in an animal and build up conscience in man. (p. 308)

O Cosmic cow
We offer souls' love
For enabling us to become
Conscious creators of the preparations.
You gift us a chance
For redeeming our debt to our mother.
Spiritual matter unites with the
Earth at the moment of your sacrifice.
May the Earth be healed
And our path secure.

—John Henry Nelson

Contributor John Henry Nelson lives and works on his family's biodynamic farm, Blueberry Hill in Green River, North Carolina.

Hugo Erbe Book in Print

The long-awaited English translation of Hugo Erbe's twenty-one preparations has recently been published by Mark Moodie from Gloucestershire, England. You may recall from past issues of *Applied Biodynamics* that Hugo Erbe (1895–1964) gave biodynamic agriculture the Three King's Preparation. Hugo Erbe's *New Biodynamic Preparations* is available from JPI for $19.95 plus postage and handling.

"All this takes a certain amount of work, of course, but if you stop and think about it, it actually takes less work than all the fooling around in chemical laboratories that goes on in the name of agriculture, and which also has to be paid for somehow. You will find that what we have discussed here is much more economical."

Rudolf Steiner – *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture,* Lecture 5, p.101

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