

Nature Spirits: How Can We Help Them?

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The nature spirits are offspring of the angelic hierarchies, but they have been here a very long time, working at the manifestation of everything visible. They are now at risk of coming under the sway of the dying forces of the universe—the dead or “rotten” ethers—which we know as electricity, magnetism, and radiation. (Rudolf Steiner spoke about electricity in the discussion after lecture eight in the Agriculture Course.) We have, in a way, been living in a garden of Eden, where whatever we needed was given to us. Now, we need to be able to help. Once upon a time, human beings would have asked for help magically. Now, however, the good forces that could have helped are part of the other aspects of existence, and what is needed is human work and understanding.

There are four main types of nature spirits:

- Elemental beings who work in solids, in plants especially in relation to the roots (gnomes);
- Those who work with the fluids and in moisture permeated air, in plants in connection with leaves and sprouting (undines);
- Those who work through air and light, at the flowering stage of plants (sylphs);
- Those who work with warmth, as seeds develop and fruits ripen (fire spirits).

SOLUTIONS

1. Pollution and Loss of Habitat

Flowers: Flowers are important to all of the nature spirits because, when a plant grows, the root and leafing take place through the presence of forces in the earth from last year's sun. When the plant reaches flowering stage, influences from the present, from sun and cosmos, begin to take effect. When the plant dies and rots into the ground, these effects are carried over into the earth, a kind of fertilization of the earth from the heavens, mediated by the plants.

- Clover seed could be sown into lawns.
- Any plantings of flowers would be welcome. Native plants will often grow in shade and in nooks and corners.
- Parking strips, roadsides, and unused land could be tilled and planted with flower mixtures.
- Flowering trees could be planted in parking strips, especially ones that would attract bees.

A habitat with borders: A place needs to develop a self-contained quality. Hedges, rows of flowers or berries, trees, or a wall can help define it. The place can be a farm, or a valley, or a field, whatever can develop a kind of unity. The *National Geographic* magazine from September 1993 has an excellent article on Britain's hedgerow system.

Microclimates: The undines work best in moisture-permeated air. In dry, windy, exposed areas, gardens might need a lot of shelter. In southern France, rows of trees protect the farms, also in hot dry plains areas in the United States. In places that are too closed in, it may be necessary to let in light and air.

Encouraging bees, beneficial insects, butterflies, and birds: The sylphs have a very close relationship to birds, and the fire spirits to bees. When bird, butterfly, and insect populations decline, especially bees, the elemental spirits are bereft, as if their family had suddenly died. The world becomes empty for them. We need them to become knowledgeable about creating and maintaining habitat for them throughout the succession of the seasons.

Water: Essential for both insects and birds. Bird baths or water features.

Birds: Birdhouses and birdfeeders in the winter.

Forage: Flowers, berries, and seeds.

There is an endless array of possible projects for school children, families, groups of friends, senior citizen centers, neighbors, college students, even businesses and churches.

Neighborhoods: People could organize, for example, to provide butterfly forage throughout the season. It could be possible to find someone willing to host a neighborhood coffee or potluck dessert evening to share handouts and information.

Sources of information for forage plants, bird houses, baths, and feeding: There are hundreds of organizations all over the country that have collected excellent information. Some samples of places in Oregon that have good handouts (usually not yet on their websites):

- Portland Nursery: Many leaflets on different types of plants for butterflies, birds, hummingbirds; cover crops. (503) 231-5050, www.portlandnursery.com.
- The Backyard Bird Shop: Excellent. (503) 496-0908.
- The Audubon Society, Portland: (503) 292-9453.
- Bosky Dell Natives, West Linn: Excellent selection of native plants, including berry-bearing shrubs and trees. (503) 638-5945.
- One Green World, Molalla: Wonderful catalog. Shrubs and trees with edible fruits and berries from all over the world. Excellent. (877) 353-4028, www.onegreenworld.com.

People in other parts of the country will need to find comparable sources. If you cannot find anyone near you who can supply local information, contact Beth Wieting at (503) 774-8764. (Sorry, no email!)

Practices: If one is going to weed out or cut down plants, it is a good idea to let the elemental beings know two days or so ahead of time. They may also take over a small, not very accessible place in the garden as a home and not want anyone to enter. If it is necessary to prune, that can be done when everything has died back. On the other hand, something that isn't healthy may take

up residence in a place which is dark, or full of rank growth. In that case, it might be a good idea to clean it out!

2. The Effect of Human Thoughts and Feelings

These are invisible beings. They know what we think and feel. Our thoughts and feelings are part of their habitat. It matters if someone knows they are there and if the person appreciates what they do, even if the person doesn't perceive them. According to Rudolf Steiner, the benevolent elemental beings tend to stay away from humans and animals, but it is very important that we know they are there. The atmosphere of a garden tended by an old person often seems especially content: a human being is out there nearly everyday working quietly and steadily with devotion, caring about everything he or she does. Then they can work alongside us and compliment what we do. The relationship becomes skewed if either the human being or the nature spirits become servants of the other. If, when we look at anything and we are aware that it could not exist without the work and sacrifice of the elemental beings, that in itself is a significant deed. It helps them very much.

3. Biodynamics

Biodynamically treated land provides a refuge for the nature spirits. They will crowd in. The land becomes gentler because of the nature of the biodynamic practices, and the intense earth and cosmic forces are backed off to a certain extent. The property becomes an oasis—even if it is only a corner in a backyard where the natural forces and processes take place in a balanced way. Every bit of land that has been helped in this way is significant.

- a) Regular biodynamic treatment: Biodynamic compost, made with the biodynamic compost preparations, then spread on the garden or land; then the horn manure preparation 500, stirred for an hour and then sprayed on bare ground in the afternoon or early evening; and finally the horn silica preparation 501 sprayed on leaves or grass as early in the morning as possible.
- b) The Maria and Matthias Thun *North American Biodynamic Sowing and Planting Calendar*: Necessary so that one can avoid working during blacked-out periods. Times given are for the Eastern time zone. The worst periods are Perigee periods of cosmic conflict and stress, and eclipses. During all of these, it is best not to do anything if that is possible, including three days before and three days after eclipses. For food plants, one also needs to avoid the period from noon to approximately 2:30 p.m. every day. Rudolf Steiner warned that there are forces coming in then that shouldn't pass into the food crops. Whatever one does, it makes the plant or the seed vulnerable to the forces at that moment.

The following two possibilities are weaker, but they definitely seem to help.

- c) If one doesn't have a biodynamic compost pile: If it is possible to get a half pint of biodynamic compost from someone else, stir it in the usual biodynamic fashion in water

for about twelve minutes, and then sprinkle that over the land on bare ground (on lawn or pasture when the grass has died back, or in early spring before it starts to grow.)

- d) Another way: One can obtain some “barrel” compost from a preparation supplier, stir it for 12-20 minutes, and then sprinkle it around in place of compost. Although, this is a weaker method, it does have a good effect. It is also possible to do this at intervals if the land needs extra support. It is easy to make cowpat pit compost: in the fall one digs a pit in the ground down about 15-18 inches, lines it with wood, and fills it full of fresh cow manure (sometimes mixed for a while with chopped nettles.) A full set of biodynamic compost preparations is inserted, each in its own hole, and then the valerian preparation is sprinkled over it. One covers it and lets it turn into compost over the winter.
- e) Preparations 500 and 501: One uses these after the application of a compost or barrel compost solution just as one normally would. It is better to have a real compost pile, but if one cannot, the substitutes do help.
- f) Woodlots: It should be possible to sprinkle out a compost solution and also preparation 500 in very early spring on the bare ground, or around the perimeter, or along roads or paths, or even along deer paths. Preparation 501 could be sprayed in the first understory of green plants in the spring, or on weeds or shrubs around the perimeter or along the roads or paths. Where the farmer used ten tons per acre, the difference was even more dramatic. A tone is considered to be one cubic yard of finished compost.
- g) Quantities: Many years ago a farmer had spread five tons of biodynamic compost per acre on an oat field—about one tablespoon of compost per square foot! Preparation 500 had been applied at about one droplet per square foot. There was a radical difference between that patch of oats and the one right beside it, which had received no treatment.

4. Anthroposophical Study

For those interested in studying Rudolf Steiner’s work: the nature spirits belong to the whole long process of creation, which changed with the incarnation of the Christ. They are in danger of losing their connection to the higher hierarchies, because angelic beings also evolve and advance, and these now work with the human thinking, feeling, willing, sense perception, and memory, in a kind of collaboration based on what use we make of them. We are a bridge for the nature spirits. It matters that there are human beings in their vicinity who have studied and who know in detail where evolution is headed, what the human being really is, and what are the present relationships of anything to the spiritual world. We are so close to the turning point of evolution that conceptions of how things used to be are still the most prevalent, and it brings light into the whole world if human beings can carry in their consciousness where we are now.

It also helps them if we say grace at meals. Substance can arise only when elemental beings sacrifice themselves, allow themselves to be enchanted into rigidity so that something invisible can arise. When we consume the food, all this dissolves, and they are released. The grace is very important.

Important books:

Prayers and Graces, collected by Michael Jones.

Verses and Meditations, Rudolf Steiner. (An important grace in this collection.)

The Cycle of the Year as the Breathing Process of the Earth, Rudolf Steiner.

Important for understanding the life cycle of nature spirits.

Man as Symphony of the Creative Word, Rudolf Steiner. Difficult but wonderful.

World Ether, Elemental Beings, and the Kingdoms of Nature, Hagemann, editor.