

## Yard and Garden - 04-28-2012 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

For some of us, it is lunar lunacy; yet others swear by it. When I began my career with Extension, I was informed that one of my duties was to write a weekly horticulture column. I am at liberty to choose any topic I desire, as long as my information is research-based. The research is to be completed by UNL horticulture research specialists or other plant professionals affiliated with Land Grant Colleges. Throughout the years, I have selected topics that are timely and provide practical, research-based information to my readers. Today I stray. Little scholastic research exists on today's topic, but I have a hunch that many of you skilled and seasoned gardeners may attest to its accuracy.

While recently shopping at a local garden center, I noticed a gardening publication made available to the public free of charge. Always interested in new gardening ideas, I picked up a copy and began to read. The title of this unusual pamphlet was *2012 Moon Sign*. It was all about planting by the light of the moon. Let me clarify, planting by the light of the moon doesn't mean planting at night in the moonlight; it means planting according to the phases of the moon.

Although I put little stock in planting by the light of the moon and have never done so, I do realize that for centuries, farmers have planted by the moon's phases. This document listed the best calendar dates, tied to the moon's phases, to perform a number of gardening activities. Some of the gardening activities included best dates for planting potatoes and tubers and mowing lawns for decreased growth, as well as mowing lawns for increased growth. It even listed the best dates to prune, to harvest, to irrigate and the best times to fertilize.

The main message of the publication focused on those plants which bear crops above the ground such as lettuce, peas, and tomatoes, and those which bear crops below the ground such as radishes, beets, carrots, and potatoes. According to *Moon Sign*, above ground crops perform better if planted when the moon is waxing, growing from new moon to a full moon, thus increasing in size. This phase is commonly referred to planting by the Light of the Moon. Those plants, however, which bear their crops below the surface of the ground perform better when planted while the moon is waning, decreasing in size from a full moon to new moon, a phase known as the Dark of the Moon.

Is any of this information research-based? Perhaps so. Through further investigation, I did discover that a Dr. Frank Brown of Northwestern University supposedly performed research over a ten-year period. He found that plants absorbed more water at the time of the full moon. Furthermore, every sixth grader knows that the gravitational pull of the moon directly affects our ocean tides. Why even song writers over the years have written lyrics about the magical romantic affect the moon has on us humans. How about Frank Sinatra's, *Fly Me to the Moon* or Anne Murray's *Shadows in the Moonlight* or the Marcel's, *Blue Moon*? Surly those moon tunes signal romance is in the air.

By now, I think you realize I'm not a believer in all this Moon Sign stuff. If, however, you are a firm believer in planting by the phases of the moon, I'd like to hear from you. What has convinced you?

One last note. I did read more of the Moon Sign document. I discovered it listed other non-gardening activities associated with moon phases. For example, it listed the best time to cut hair to decrease growth as well as best time to have your hair cut to increase growth. Since I am thinning a little on the top, I did highlight those dates on when to cut hair to increase growth. I'll let you know if it works.