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Book reviews

Die Düngerpräparate Rudolf Steiners – Herstellung und Anwendung
(Rudolf Steiner's Preparations for Fertilising– Production and Application)

Walter Stappung, Author and Publisher, ISBN 978-3-9521944-4-7

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This book, in a large format, 632 pages in total, with a separately bound bibliographical part, overall weight 2.2 kg., in striking yellow, was not to be overlooked at the Agricultural Conference, where it turned up brand new from the printers. Just as the author, Walter Stappung, is not to be overlooked. At a lot of biodynamic gatherings he is to be recognised by his striking outfit with his broad-brimmed, black hat. But also in a spiritual-cultural sense Walter has been a prominent figure for many years. With his open and, simultaneously, unconventional manner he travels around as an expert on the preparations. Holding this large book in your hands, you wonder, now what is in this book?

How is this compendium structured? How does Walter manage to strike the balance between objectively collecting all the available indications and his own decided positioning, well-known from conversations? How is the author's inner and outer attitude towards his theme?

The author's attitude becomes evident straight away, in fact, with the title of the work, "Rudolf Steiner's Preparations for *Fertilising*" – this is making an announcement! With the preparations it is the fertilising that counts – in my view this is right. Of course, this presupposes an essentially extended concept of fertilising. For, the essential nature of what fertilising is remains a mystery – yet it provides a never-ending task for practical farming and research for agriculture, inspired by anthroposophy. Terming and understanding the preparations as medicines or sacraments, as is frequently done, may open up interesting viewpoints, yet it does not get to the heart of the matter. Thus, I believe that Walter hits the first nail on the head with his title.

He hits the second nail on the head with the title of the chapter in which he introduces the preparations in a general way: "The preparations – the core of Rudolf Steiner's approach". According to my assessment his characterisation of them as the core is an accurate evaluation and fits into the overall context of what we call biodynamics. They are not some element or other among many, and neither are they everything, but they are indeed comparable to the core or the heart – the pulsating centre, into which everything flows and from where a lot of things start for farming and research.

In many other parts of the book Walter Stappung's healthy, down-to-earth outlook reappears; for instance, he clearly rejects several passages which speculatively attribute statements to Steiner. The necessary importance is attached to a situation-based, personal approach and, at the same time, no legitimacy is accorded to a naïve, ignorant approach. For Walter practice for which the individual takes responsibility themselves is the most important thing, and he wants to be of service to this approach with his compendium; for him the point is not a description of the preparations in itself.

Personally I could not find my way into the structuring of the book. It does indeed follow the well-trodden path from the spray preparations to the compost preparations and from production to application. However, what the viewpoint was behind putting a subject matter in the main part and then again in the appendix, remains unclear. For example, the cow horn preparation is discussed both in the main part and in the appendix that *are separated in the book by a good 400 pages*, and yet they appear listed in the contents together. Then the related bibliography is put in a second, separate volume. Essentially the book consists of all the material collected on the preparations. First of all, this applies to the Agriculture Course, secondly, to everything that has been published on the preparations in the last 92 years, thirdly, to the results of research trips and visits to many preparation producers from around the world and, fourthly, to his own practical experience over many years. In brief, the wealth of material is vast and

the structuring suffers under the weight of it. Everything is recorded, no selection is made. Nonetheless, the author may absolutely lay claim to providing the most comprehensive account of the theme. There has not been an evaluation of the material according to essential/non-essential, everything has been recorded. Thus, for example, spreading the preparations by drones gets a mention just as much as the application of preparations on golf courses.

A *piece de resistance* is dealing with the question of the mesentery. As is well-known, for many people this is the parting of the ways concerning what Steiner meant and which of the membranes from the abdominal cavity is the right one for the dandelion preparation. The internal world of the cow and the practical steps for separating the membranes is clearly shown with colour photographs. Then you have to leaf through 400 pages in order to find the scientific data and the practical experience, which are each recorded faithfully. What is right and what is wrong among the various parts and variants of the inner membranes? Walter leaves it open, he opens up the possibility that perhaps the same thing is not optimal in both light soil *and* heavy soil; he speaks openly about the way he has developed and progressed from using the omentum as a whole to using the part of the peritoneum that covers the mesentery. Here we have it: comprehensive in gathering the material, exact in the analysis and leaving people free in their practice.

The question remains as to how Walter lets his own opinion – and I really know this side of him – stand out. He has found a clever solution. The long list of particulars gathered on a subject is suddenly interrupted with the announcement “commentary”. Then the author says what he has to say, and concludes this commentary neatly. For example, one author is quoted saying, “Biodynamics is a robust system. No need to worry about it not working”. Walter Stappung’s commentary is: “However, there is no justification for being sloppy and slipshod. I attach more value to taking care, to working carefully than to any particular method of working”.

For all those wanting to get to grips more closely with the preparations a collection of all the available sources, indications and experience is presented here. The author’s attitude is down-to-earth towards speculative tendencies, which always surround this subject. This factual objectivity offers the basis for tolerance towards a lot of his colleagues’ approaches. I think this comprehensive collection of indications and experience with the preparations is of great benefit to the biodynamic movement; and I would wish it to become widely known and available to people, study groups, associations, training courses, etc., wherever the nurturing of the preparation work in practice, research and teaching is one of the ongoing tasks.