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Remaining

The soil likes compost, and sweat

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Posted: Sunday, March 6, 2016 5:00 am

Nate Downey/For The New Mexican

I know it's a little early to be thinking about Thanksgiving, but farmers and gardeners already are. Tools have been sharpened, fruit trees have been pruned, and compost is being dug deep into the living land. Seeds are being sown in

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A double-diggin' columnist

little black compartments filled with moist soil. Plant nurseries are buzzing with that happy smile of spring.

Soon I'll be performing a physical activity known as double digging. It's a biointensive gardening technique that I learned from *How to Grow More Vegetables* by John Jeavons. Biointensive gardening is quite a workout, so it's not an activity that I do every year. But every year I choose to do it, the positive results are obvious not only in the garden but also with respect to my spiritual wellbeing.

Double digging typically starts with several good-sized piles of homemade compost, and it ends with that same compost mixed 24 inches deep into the soil. Talk about a plush bed. A double-dug garden means luscious bliss if you happen to have a root system.

The process requires specific tools, including a sturdy garden fork, a rectangular spade, a wheelbarrow, and a four-foot-by-two-foot slab of plywood. Jeavons' tried-and-true strategy assures you will not get injured — as long as you do it right. My experience is that Jeavons is technically correct. Follow his directions to a tee, and you're fine. But one wrong move — one lousy shortcut — and you may be calling your chiropractor or starting a lifelong yoga regime. For a how-to video, visit www.growbiointensive.org.

Another activity that's less body-intensive, planting with the lunar calendar, is one that I have been inspired to try again this year. This biodynamic technique suggests that yields are increased when aboveground crops and underground

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crops are planted in accordance with the size and shape of the moon. Like biointensive gardening, every time I've tried any biodynamic techniques, they seem to work. Both methods are big on building healthy soil. Both worship compost.

There is also a lot of crossover between permaculture and biodynamics. Both systems stress the importance of animals (including worms) in the garden. Both stress the importance of floral diversity. Both provide a holistic approach to farming and gardening that is ecological, ethical, efficient, productive, and fully inspired by decades of success.

But here's the real reason that I want you thinking about Thanksgiving. On the weekend before Turkey Day 2016 you might not have time to shop. That's because this year the North American Biodynamic Conference will be coming to Santa Fe Nov. 16-20, and you won't want to miss five days of hands-on workshops, inspiring keynotes, and the chance to rub shoulders with hundreds of biodynamic farmers and gardeners from across the continent.

I caught up with Thea Maria Carlson, a conference organizer, on a recent conference-preparation mission. When asked what she liked to plant most in the garden, "I like to plant diversity," she said, not skipping a beat. No matter who gets elected president, it appears Santa Fe will still have much to be thankful for this November. For more info about the conference and biodynamics, visit www.biodynamics.com.

Nate Downey, the author of Harvest the Rain, has been a local landscape consultant, designer, and contractor since 1992. He can be reached at 505-690-7939 or via www.permadesign.com.

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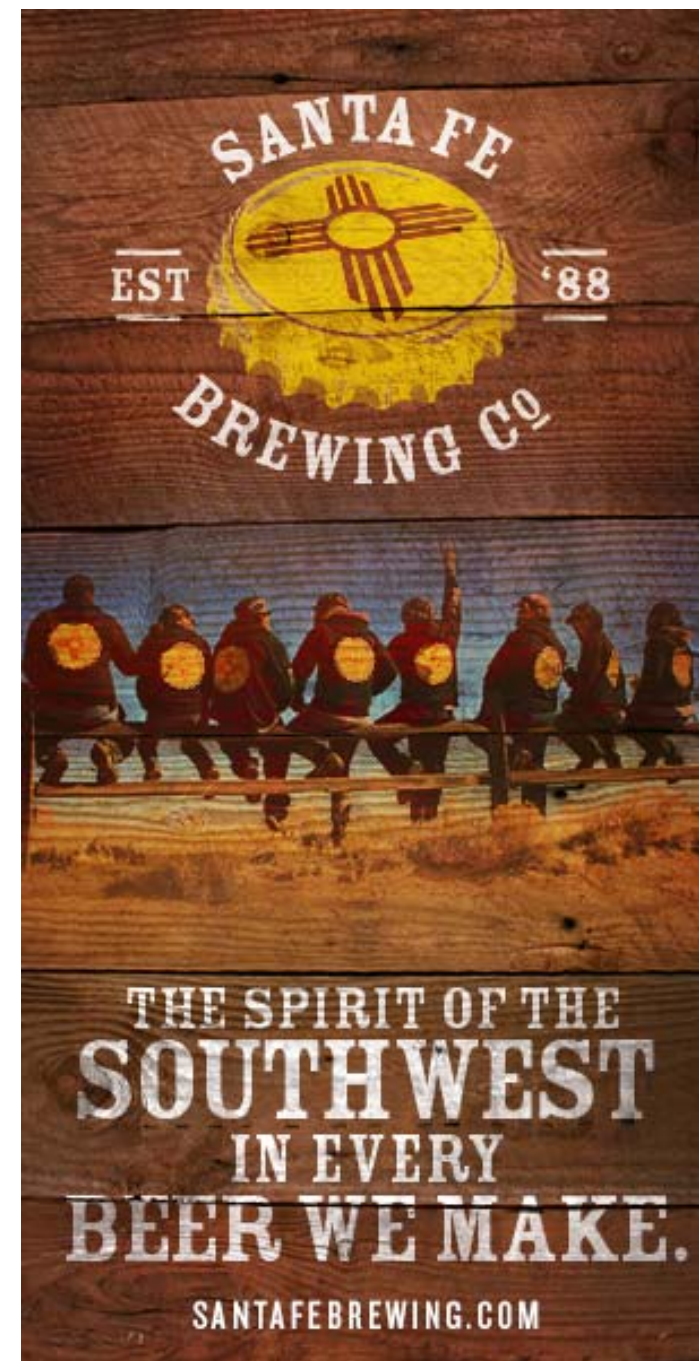
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