“The first seed that we planted in the spring was the sunflower seed,” Buffalo Bird Woman explained to Gilbert Wilson (Wilson 1917:16), recalling her early attempts at gardening when she was 18 years of age, around 1857. She then noted how she and her contemporaries decided when it was time to plant their floodplain fields along the Missouri River in central-western North Dakota:

Ice breaks on the Missouri about the first week in April; and we planted sunflower seed as soon after as the soil could be worked. Our native name for the lunar month that corresponds most nearly to April, is Mapı-óce-midi, or Sunflower-planting-moon (Wilson 1917:16).

So begins one of the earliest American accounts of *ethnophenology*, the cultural perception of the timing of recurrent natural history events, in this case, for their use in managing horticultural crops. It was recorded between 1906 and 1916 when Buffalo Bird Woman—known to her Hidatsa kinsmen as Maxidiwiac—was between 67 and 77 years of age. But Gilbert Wilson had asked her to reconstruct “an ethnographic present” that occurred just before the Civil War, when she was living at Like-a-Fishhook Village near old Fort Berthold:

I take Maxidiwiac (Buffalo Bird Woman) as the typical informant [sic]. I take her account of a single year’s work, in the main, when she was about eighteen years of age. I follow the seasons with her, getting her always to add all she can or will of personal experiences (Wilson 1917: xix).

Although there were risks in constructing an idealized ethnographic present for the Hidatsa through one elderly woman’s recollections half a century later, this may have allowed Buffalo Bird Woman to spatially and temporally situate her experiences with some precision. Let us listen to what she had to say to Reverend Wilson about when the seeds of corn should be planted in mounds:

Corn planting began the second month after the sunflower-seed was planted, that is in May; and it lasted a month…We knew when corn planting time came by observing the leaves of wild gooseberry bushes. This bush is the first of the woods to leaf in the spring. Old women of the village were going into the woods daily to gather fire wood; and when they saw that the wild gooseberry bushes were almost in full leaf, they said, ’It is time for you to begin planting corn!’ (Wilson 1917:22).

If we compare the phenological indicators that Buffalo Bird Woman used to prompt the timing of planting for sunflowers and maize, some complexities are