

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – Dec. 9, 2008

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'WINTER GROWER' REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(If you'd like to contribute to these reports in future let me know and I'll add you to the list)

(Argyle NY) Winter greetings to all farmers! We have been doing winter growing in tunnels since 1992 in Zone 4, growing mostly spinach which is seeded in our greenhouse in Speedling trays on Sept. 1st, then transplanted out on Oct. 1st into unheated tunnels (14' by 100'); then the spinach is harvested all winter with great success utilizing double P19 (mid-weight) rowcovers, unhooped. Our favorite transplanted winter spinach varieties are Tyee, Remington, and Renegade. For the past 2 years, we have been doing winter growing in one larger unheated Rimol high tunnel (30' by 144') with good success growing spinach (mostly direct seeded on Oct. 10th), Swiss chard and kale (transplanted from an Aug. 15th seeding). This year in May we built another Rimol high tunnel (34' by 144') and this winter, based on other growers advice, we are also experimenting with Asian Greens (tatsoi, mizuna), Johnny's Selected Seeds Five Star lettuce mix (has great disease resistance and nice red color), and arugula. Raised beds with Biotello plastic (corn starch) mulch are being used on several rows. We'll be weeding out chickweed this week! We find that keeping the humidity down by venting and removing the rowcovers on sunny days is important. All our greens as well as root-celared crops (from a 20' by 30' climate-controlled root cellar that holds about 25 tons of 13 different crops) are sold every Saturday all winter at a local indoor farmers' market, which customers have become great supporters of. We hope to hear of everyone's successes, failures, and tips!

(Craftsbury) Greenhouses are all battened down for the winter. We completed and moved four 35 by 200 ft. houses in late October. They moved with ease with a 44 hp tractor with a hydraulic winch mounted on the bucket pulling each side. We have very minimal endwalls; double-poly wirelocked on the last hoop and anchored on the ground with a continuous line of 60 lb sandbags. The idea is that with a minimum of work (moving the bags off the plastic and tying the plastic up) we can open up the whole width of the endwall for tractor access. I think we will evolve to a better solution but this was quick and cheap. Some crops look good, others were covered a little late or are not the right varieties for the damp fall conditions.

(Westminster West) We spent the last month doing major repairs and updates on the greenhouses, including putting new IRC plastic on all the houses and new multi-walled plastic end walls. New better drained floors with insulated perimeters. Lots of ways to spend both time and money and to keep the staff busy in the slower months. We just finished transplanting 7,000 Alpine strawberry plants for early spring sales, they are growing fast on heated benches. No white fly or aphids showing on up the rosemary plants. We starting seeding the early Pansy's in a few days. The whole new season starts way too soon!

(Montpelier) The below-normal temps in November with no insulating snow around the greenhouse baseboards caused a lot of problems with perimeter crops. Also, have very pernicious Downy Mildew disease but it seems to be under control with a cocktail of biofungicides on a 7 day schedule, using Cease, Milstop, and Neem oil. Cease is a new OMRI approved product from Bioworks. I have seen some positive results on some badly infected plugs that seem to be rebounding. Tinkering with a lot of things to maintain crop regrowth through the winter months without using supplemental heat. Still sprouting and growing out some plugs on some new cold hardy varieties to see how they do. Waiting to see how the economy is going to affect winter market pricing for fresh local salad mix. Already losing some CSA customers due to cutting their budgets back.

(Durham CT) We've been harvesting from our high tunnels for 4 weeks now. Our best choices are spinach (Remington and Space), red Russian kale, baby bok choy and claytonia. Other frost-hardy varieties tend to turn yellow or even worse to mush. That would include tatzoi, mizuna and giant red mustard. All these varieties are happy enough with chilly, frosty nights, but don't stand up to hard freezes, for us. Thanks to a tip from Sandy Arnold, we planted our last spinach by Oct. 17 and are now enjoying a beautiful crop. We love these winter warriors-their sweet flavor rivals anything else. My big question for all of you: Is it better to clean out an area after harvesting once and replant or wait till the light returns and get regrowth?

(Fairlee) Spinach is holding well in our 48' by 26' greenhouse under a single row cover without supplemental heat. We heated it one morning to 40 degrees to pick for our pre-Thanksgiving market. It took 2/3 of a bag of wood pellets to get the heat up using our pellet furnace, which is about 3 dollars of fuel. We picked 20 pounds that day and 20 pounds again before our Dec. 5th market. The greens growing in soil boxes on tables are dying back after the first cutting and without supplemental heat. We're considering putting germination mats under them and adding some blueboard insulation under the mats. Not sure it's worth it yet and don't know how to monitor the electricity usage.

(Starksboro) I have 2 small hoop houses with greens in them. I'm new at the winter greens thing and already have a long list of things not to do next year. We cut some for the Thanksgiving Farmers' Market and some for our early December CSA. I'd like to think we'll have some more for the Christmas Farmers' Market and if I'm lucky an early January CSA. We'll see...

(Burlington) Root veggies are tucked away all snug in their beds while visions of butternut dance in my head. Year four of our winter CSA share program and I continue to be surprised at how much demand beyond supply we find. Considering moving to a full-year CSA membership for those members having both summer and winter CSA shares. Good supply of roots, with nice quality on most all crops. As always, trying to maintain good humidity in the cooler is a bit of a challenge, so appreciate those closed clamshell totes for quality storage. Late fall/early winter spinach crop is very nice, though we're almost done with harvest.

Amazing what inflated poly with a row cover can do without heat! Heading for the zero fresh greens period of late December through mid-February, though we're experimenting with Belgian Endive this year for a mid-winter treat. Anybody have great recipe suggestions for salsify and scorzonera?

2009 TRI-STATE GREENHOUSE WORKSHOPS

Jan 7,8,9 in ME,NH, VT

This one-day annual workshop is held on 3 consecutive dates in January. This year the focus is on biological controls of greenhouse pests, and distinguishing diseases from nutritional disorders. Speakers include Dr. Brian Krug, UNH and Bruce Watt from Univ. of ME. They will show growers how to distinguish plant diseases from nutrient deficiencies. Steve Wraight from Cornell Univ. and USDA will discuss ways to optimize use of insect-killing fungi, and Alan Eaton, UNH; Cheryl Frank and Margaret Skinner, UVM; and Kathy Murray of the ME Dept. of Ag will talk about novel methods of using parasites and predators to manage greenhouse pests. You can sign up for whichever date suits you. Wednesday, Jan. 7 is at Longfellow's Greenhouse, Manchester, ME; Thursday, Jan. 8 is at the UNH greenhouses, Durham, NH; and Friday, Jan. 10 is at UVM in Burlington, VT. Registration is only \$30, which includes handouts, the Greenhouse Manager's Guide to IPM and lunch. Parking permits are required for the UNH and UVM sites, costing \$6.00. These workshops are "hands-on" so space is limited, and pre-registration is required. Five pesticide credits will be awarded. To register or ask questions, contact Cheryl Frank, UVM Entomology Research Lab, 661 Spear St., Burlington, VT 05405-0105 TEL: 802-656-5434 cheryl.frank@uvm.edu.

BEGINNING FARMER BUSINESS PLANNING COURSE

Growing Places - Exploring the opportunities and realities of an agriculturally based business.

***January 14, 21, & 28 (with Feb. 4 as a possible snow date), Springfield, VT**

The University of Vermont Extension Women's Agricultural Network will offer a Southern Vermont session of Growing Places, a non-credit course for people interested in starting or expanding an agricultural business. The course will start January 14 in Springfield. Growing Places participants develop goals for themselves and their businesses, become more familiar with financing options, identify and evaluate available resources, examine marketing strategies, and learn about agencies and organizations that provide support and assistance to farmers.

Growing Places is open to anyone. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis. The course will run from 9:30 am to 3 pm on Wednesdays January 14, 21, and 28. February 4 is also being held as a possible class date in case weather conditions force a cancellation on one of the earlier dates. Tuition is \$125, but there is a \$25 discount for people who register by the early bird deadline of December 19. The regular registration deadline is January 7. Additionally, limited scholarship assistance is available to qualified individuals. For more information and to obtain registration materials, visit WAgN's website at www.uvm.edu/wagn Or contact Beth Holtzman at 802-223-2389 or toll-free in Vermont at 866-860-1382.

POMFRET THIRD GRADE SEEKS GROWERS TO FILL OUT ON-LINE SURVEY

The third grade students at the Pomfret, Vermont Elementary School have participated in an in-depth study of soil this fall. Their final project has been to create a survey with questions that they wrote for fruit and vegetable growers. The students will be analyzing the data collected using the skills they have been practicing their math program. Please go to this web site to complete the survey: www.wcsu.net.

UPCOMING EVENTS (see www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry for details, click on Meetings)

Growing in High Tunnels and Greenhouses. Sturbridge MA. Dec. 12, 2008

Farmer to Farmer conference: vegetable production. Fairlee, VT Jan 5-6, 2009

VT Vegetable and Berry Growers annual meeting, Montpelier, VT. Feb. 9, 2009

NOFA-VT Winter Conference, Randolph Center, VT. Feb. 14-15, 2009