



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 30, 2015
compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Hinesburg) Hoop house spinach and claytonia showed negligible growth this December through February. Other years there's been noticeable growth. Lots of damaged (frost I think) leaves to pick through on the Corvair spinach.

(Colchester) On Jan. 21 we seeded tomatoes in 288 trays for our first greenhouse; we seeded 850 seeds to fill the house. On Feb. 3 we transplanted into the greenhouse bags. We ordered bumble bees on March 16 when we saw about 30% of the plants in flower. Received bees on March 18 and put hive in greenhouse. The bees came in very active and the next morning we saw many in flight pollinating all the flowers they could. Burning shell corn in that house to supplement oil heat, burning smooth no problems so far. We also started seeding annual flowering plants on Jan. 21. All crops looking great; hoping for a warming trend to slow down fuel usage.

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) Everything in cold greenhouse is up, even the mesclun seeded on frozen soil. The unbalanced air and soil temp make it difficult for the plants to take advantage of that sun. End of March sun really makes the soil mass absorb energy as I am sometime noticing difference between out and in temp at 8 in the morning. Lost 30 percent of overwintering spinach, 10 percent overwintering green oignons and 90 percent on overwintering lettuce. Ginger from seed is outexpecting my craziest dream I wonder how they will keep until transplantation. I am a bit behind with sweet potato multiplication. Getting prepared for season, material is getting slowly to the farm as there is still a lot of snow here and I am now doing maintenance on machinery when the outside temp is not too cold (unheated garage).

(Westminster West) Just returned from Cuba with the Vermont Caribbean Institute on a trip to find common ground with Cuban vegetable and fruit growers. I think I received more than I gave, knowledge-wise. Saw what farmers can do in a land of such scarcity and then returned home to this wonderful state awash in stuff and opportunity. They make do without any outside inputs; were fascinated by the sample of Remay that I bought along! They also don't have this wonderful brain trust on a list serve like we do. More about this trip some other time, great pictures and movies to share.

On the ranch here, surprised (not) to still see my fields under a foot of snow and ice. Greenhouses filling up with bedding plants and herbs, delaying first deliveries due to weather. So far the biggest mistake we made is using the fine grade of vermiculite to cover some onion trays as we ran out of our normal medium grade, big mistake, never use the fine grade, it washes away and leads to poor germination. I need to replant about 60 trays of Redwing, oh well. Having some trouble filling some positions this year which is a change from past years, is the economy really improving that much?

(Little Compton RI) It's that time of year to get the greenhouse tomatoes up and running. I suggest that anyone who has 12 to 15 year-old houses take a look at their cables that hold up tomato plants. There is a lot of weight there and we had a wind storm last year where three of our cables snapped in June with a full load of harvestable tomatoes. It wasn't pretty. Check the cable! Even though the hardware store says it is galvanized, I wouldn't trust it to not rust in 10 years and get brittle. Seems like a slow to warm up spring and a wet one too. So not much ground prep going on and we are two weeks behind everything else and I am fine with that. Markets are losing momentum because nothing new is coming in to pique folks' interest. We did well with some baby daffodils for Easter sales but still rather slow. Putting our toes into micro greens to add some spice to our presentation. It may be the only way to grow basil this season

(Plainfield NH) No activity in the field. Either brush cutting or blueberry pruning, snow is still too deep. Full bore in the greenhouse with ornamentals and vegetables. Almost a full crew, so the trips to Yankee Farm Credit seem to be happening with alarming frequency as there is no income stream to be had for another month. Finally got in place a few high efficiency Modine Heaters with Wadsworth Controls, with some energy upgrade cost-sharing with NRCS. The unit heaters are working well. We had purchased a couple before on our own and were familiar with them. The verdict is still out on the sophisticated Wadsworth Controls. They are very expensive and have to be preset/reset by Wadsworth in Ohio. This makes on-site adjustment cumbersome as it is essentially a computer that you have very little range in controlling. That said, the aspirated sensors help keep heat very steady, so we are reserving judgement, although am not sure the cost is justifiable for what we all do, which is basically run most of our greenhouse heaters and ventilators for 8 to 12 weeks a year. It's a huge leap in cost to achieve high efficiency, Currently trialing a cellular based temp alarm system that my nephew built after he got fed up with me whining about dependable temp sensing and monitoring. It is replacing our old hard wired system that all too frequently has been rototilled or backhoed up, and our frost control has been done by just staying up on vigil all night. It's pretty exciting and even though he recognizes some bugs that need his attention, we are excited about how it is developing, and we are able to monitor with iPads and cell phones. This will be available to other folks as soon as he is satisfied it is bomb proof.

(Argyle NY) Our three high tunnels are producing winter greens like crazy and the spinach is the nicest we have had in years. We have 18 varieties and most are doing good with Giant Winter bolting but we knew that would happen though we love GW for its early growth. We attribute the vigor of spinach to the hot-water treating of the seed and the drenching of the tunnels every year twice with Root Shield plus, Serenade and Actinovate and we see no more signs of Fusarium which we had badly 5 - 6 years ago. Fertility was also increased on the pre-plant amount to get over 150 lb of N in September, but it is so slow release, we find it is lasting a long time and depending on the next crop in the spring, we need very little extra. We had also used peat moss for organic matter instead of compost on half of the tunnel areas and there is no difference in growth. All appears great and we don't have the weed seed issues. Hoping someday to have a better compost source, but this is working well for us and the cost of the peat moss by the pallet is cheaper than compost.

Salanova lettuce is producing well for the last seeding date of mid-Sept. No disease at all in the lettuce direct seeded for salad mix. Our favorites (all high disease resistance) are Bixby, Spock, Blade, Crissy, Refugio, Bolsachica, Letting, Aerostar, Gaviota, and Dane. Tearing out lots in the tunnels and planting head lettuce, scallions, and Asian green transplants in, plus direct seeding radishes, arugula, herbs, etc. Our root cellar with 35 to 37 degree temp and 98% humidity is still quite full with most things still in good supply, even cabbage. Still have snow on fields though getting spotty and we finally got some leeks out from under the Typar this past week. Tadornas look good and we will assess other varieties when the snow/ice is gone. Anxious for 70 and sun!

BLUEBERRY AND BRAMBLE PRUNING

(Mary Concklin, UConn Extension Fruit Specialist)

Blueberries: if you can budget the time, wait to prune your blueberries in early spring before growth starts. Right now most blueberry plants are still buried in snow making it difficult to remove canes at ground level. More importantly, by then you should have a better idea whether the bushes have sustained winter injury to canes and/or buds. Most blueberry varieties we grow in CT are hardy down to -10 to -15 degrees F particularly when these cold temperatures don't occur immediately following a warm trend. However with the cold temperatures, we have had desiccating strong winds which may have caused some bud damage. Annual pruning is needed to maintain healthy productive fruiting wood.

What should be removed: canes older than 6 years pruned to the ground (older wood is less productive and produces small berries), dead wood, scale infested canes, canes growing out into the alleyway, and low branches that will only produce small berries no one will ever bend over to pick. Then thin out this past year's new canes leaving 2-3/bush.

Detail pruning will be needed if the remaining canes and laterals are so thick that sunlight can't penetrate throughout the bush. Annual pruning invigorates the plant resulting in new cane development, young canes produce the largest berries, large berries fill containers faster than small berries which in the end equals greater income to the grower and longer lasting healthy bushes.

Blueberry bushes that are under 3 years of age should require minimal pruning: the removal of dead or broken canes and the removal of ALL flower buds which will allow the plants to put all their energy into cane production. Begin fruiting 3 year old bushes with a small crop if they have put on sufficient growth. A heavy crop on a young bush will only stunt its growth.

Brambles: You can't see the ground so you can't prune the brambles yet. As with blueberries, bramble canes are removed at the base. Pruning that leaves long stubs only invites cane diseases to take hold as well as allowing cane borers already in the canes to continue to move to the crown. Sticking the loppers or pneumatic pruners into the snow to remove a cane at ground level often times lead to the wrong cane removed as well as cut irrigation lines. As for winter hardiness of summer bearing (floricane bearing) cane berries, much is variety dependent. With raspberries, most will tolerate the cold temperatures we experienced but not the desiccating winds. Lauren canes above the snow line are likely dead, other varieties may have sustained some damage. Blackberries do not tolerate the cold temperatures of this past winter and most will sustain injury when temperatures are below 0 degrees F if not protected. Protection would consist of laying the canes over on the swing arm trellis or laying them on the ground and covering them.

When you are able to see the ground, remove canes that bore fruit last year, then thin out the remaining canes to 4-6 per running foot of row. Fall bearing (primocane bearers) brambles that were left standing to produce a second crop early this summer, simply remove the upper portion of the cane where last season's fruit were. After they crop in early summer, prune those canes out to the ground. Thin out the remaining new primocanes for better penetration of SWD control materials.

AGRITOURISM CONFERENCE APRIL 7-8, RUTLAND VT

Join farmers, educators, and service providers in Rutland, Vermont for a two-day exploration of open farms. More information at www.uvm.edu/vtagritourism. Register on-line at <https://www.regonline.com/vtagritourism-apr2015-rutland> by Friday, April 3. Space is limited. For more information: contact Lisa Chase at 802-257-7967 or lisa.chase@uvm.edu.

FARM TRANSFER WORKSHOPS APRIL 8 and 10

Farm Transfer workshops to be held on April 8 in Brattleboro and April 10 in South Burlington. The brochure is also available at <http://www.uvm.edu/farmtransfer/2015TTFworkshops.pdf>. Workshops will run from 9:00 to 3:30 and lunch is provided. The workshops will address family communication, goal setting, retirement, estate planning, taxes, methods to transfer assets, and business organization. An attorney will speak on wills, trusts, medicaid issues, and other legal issues. There will also be farmer panel discussing how they went about the farm business and farmland transition process. Questions? Bob Parsons, 802-656-2109 or bob.parsons@uvm.edu.