



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 15, 2015
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Rochester) Finally spring has arrived, the snow is thawing rapidly, our spirits are on the rise, and blueberry pruning has begun.

(Warren) Snow is finally gone. Happy to have well drained ground this spring for sure. Transplants all look really good so far. Grafted tomatoes from Johnny's seeds were planted last week in the hothouse. It's my first experience with grafted plants and I'm really impressed with the vigor. Carrots seeded in our movable high tunnels had really nice germination. Peas and beets, not so much.

(Westminster West) The frost just let go of the fields a few days ago. The drainage ditches we dug last fall are doing a fine job removing excess water from the fields so hopefully I can start field work a bit more timely than last year. Finally started shipping early veggie flats and herbs out in decent volume now that early garden season is underway (sorta). Not much changes in my field plans from last year, just some adjustments and expanding a bit on crops that seemed to sell well and profitably. Finally put a crew together, 14 people on payroll at the moment, seems harder this year to find people, maybe the economy is better than it has been, hard to say but happy I have enough people to get the job done. One more greenhouse to repair this week then onto field work, I hope!

(Northfield) Sent photos of diseased tunnel spinach to Ann Hazelrigg who replied "looks like Cladosporium (especially areas with greenish sporulation) a common fungal disease of spinach. If things are humid/wet in there, it can spread fast." Indeed, we had done some overhead watering for nearby Asian green starts but we pulled all visibly impacted plants and avoided subsequent moisture on spinach leaves and remaining spinach looks good. For more info see: <https://nevegetable.org/crops/disease-control-21>. As soon as our blanket of snow leaves us we'll be excited to try our new Buckeye disc bedder!

(Burlington) Soil is drying out, should have the usual cold-hardy direct seeded crops in the ground this week. Appreciating again the Salanova lettuces and how well they seem to do through the winter in unheated tunnels; they are producing like crazy right now; we will see how late into the spring that will go before yield and quality decline. Winter CSA members glad to have more green stuff again, and summer CSA sales are brisk. So far the river is behaving itself, despite the substantial snowpack. Finally figured out that our grafting troubles were likely related to insufficient humidity in the healing chamber. Life is so much better with a small household humidifier in the mix!

(Charlotte) We are busy cleaning up the fields from the down trees. Finishing up what we can do for pruning for the year, and preparing the beds for all of the new plants coming this year. Very excited to see the sun and warm weather!

(Dummerston) All my growing areas are finally free of snow. I uncovered the strawberry plants about a month later than some years; we'll see if they catch up. Garlic is up and the little plants are happy to be in raised beds above the mud puddles in the pathways. Lots of cleanup to do. I will not be using biotello mulch this year because it has not been breaking down thoroughly and I now have lots of scraps from last year to pick up. My main field is still mired in mud from the seasonal high water table. So I was thrilled to find some soil that was actually dry enough to plow on another rented field. Yesterday I plowed about a quarter to half an acre. I'll just put up some deer fencing and it'll be a good spot for my early greens. The growing season might not be off to such a late start after all. CSA sign-ups are running a bit behind the usual for this time of year. But we'll see if they pick up now that the weather is nice.

(Newburyport MA) First peas put in April 13; latest planting date in many, many years. Unheated Spinach houses planted December 5th growing well and should be ready to start harvest in a week, cvs. Regiment and Butterflay. Trying Bumble Bees to pollinate two most advanced Tomato houses. Never tried this before, Bumbles will arrive on the 15th. 100% survival rate on grafted tomatoes from CA, nine different cultivars. I think it's worth having them grafted by professionals with ideal climate control (Plug Connection). Greenhouse crops and transplants growing well despite dark weather. Burning a lot of oil to accomplish this. Need a second round of ladybugs for green aphids. Farmers' Markets improving seasonally, but not nearly as \$ productive as they were thirty years ago. CSA signups running a little behind. And input costs keep rising for everything except oil.

(Little Compton RI) Suddenly, it appears spring is here. Trying some new OMRI-approved SoluCal, a new quick-acting, high-calcium lime. Last January the snow showed up early and never gave up so we never got our liming done. I am hoping this will bailout a nice looking garlic crop in much need of pH redemption! Having lost the battle 4 out of 5 years with organically grown Brussels sprouts, we just may put them on some conventional ground.

Between Alternaria and gray winter aphids, we just can't win for losing. And frankly our small experimental conventional crop sold very well at the winter farmers' markets. We are also going to seed them about three weeks later than in the past. By accident, last year we seeded some May 28 and they did better than the April 30 seeding. We are also going to pull in our 36" between row spacing to 34" for our two-row beds of late cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Reasons: Less damage to outer leaves during last cultivation; better air flow between the two row beds (and hopefully less Alternaria); and lastly better light for getting winter cover crops to take when interseeded in late fall. We bought some certified organic annual rye to try out seeding down the edges of our black plastic for our winter squash. Saw that at the VVBGA winter conference and it looked like a good solution.

(Hampton NY) Annuals are growing well and potted over-wintered perennials are beginning to emerge. Colder greenhouse temps slowed growth with no adverse effects. Hanging baskets are planted and growing well. Cold weather crops have been seeded in packs and peat pots and are starting to pop. Tomatoes and peppers are being transplanted into packs and peat pots. Work is starting in the garden and peas are in the ground. We will be trying cucumber beetle traps this summer to see if they work.

UVM SOIL TESTS REVISED

The UVM Agricultural and Environmental Testing Lab now has new software for generating soil test results and fertility recommendations. I have worked with the lab to develop what hopefully are easier-to-interpret numerical results and crop-specific recommendations and comments, as well as a new fact sheet for helping to interpret the test results, posted on line at: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/FertilizingVegetableCropsBasedOnSoilTest.pdf>. The standard UVM soil test for vegetable and small fruit crops includes pH; organic matter, available aluminum, boron, calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, sulfur and zinc, percent base saturation; effective CEC, and Ca:Mg:K ratio, along with fertility recommendations. The cost is \$14 per sample. You can add a heavy metals screening test for an additional \$10. Compost and manure tests also available. The forms and sampling instructions are on line at: http://pss.uvm.edu/ag_testing/. I welcome your feedback on soil test recommendations for commercial vegetables and berries.