

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 6, 2010

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Royalton) Planted field peas today and going to plant more tomorrow; peas and beans in hoop house are about four inches high. Field garlic is out of the mulch and growing strong about four inches high; rhubarb is bulbed and ruby red, ready for first leaves. Pulling lots of volunteer tomato seedlings in the hoop house; kale, spinach, lettuce still producing without bolting. Thinking about planting pineapples and avocados for next season.

(Rochester) The warm weather is causing the blueberries to swell up way early. Some are already breaking bud. We have seen our first bumblebees already and frogs are in full voice in the pond. We have laid in a new section of drip irrigation covering an additional half acre or more and will be planting blueberries and raspberries on April 6. That's pretty early for us--we would usually still have frozen ground at this time. In the raspberries we have had a crew of up to 6 helpers making light work of the pruning. We offer PYO discounts to raspberry pruners and when the weather turned warm they came out in force. Spring fills us with hope, but it's so warm so early! It's hard not to imagine we will be biting our nails through most of May, praying there is no late frost.

(Starksboro) Vern stopped by and he dropped off a penetrometer so I can see what I have for plow pans. Very interesting. Even in these light soils I have a fairly consistent compacted layer at 10 to 12 inches. The winter market has been exciting. Burlington is in its second year and we had something green every month except January. It's amazing how much off season production has come along in just the last 5 years.

(W. Rutland) Well, most of the garlic survived the 8 degree temperatures last winter, at least the stuff I covered with an extra touch of mulch. The sun has been good for the greenhouse flowers and the future forecast calls for easy heating, so my wood supply will hold out. Got river problems and the state engineer is coming next week. Hope he gives me the permit cause I've been pulling big stone out of the ground getting ready to battle the river one more time. Speaking of stone, and battles, You'll never guess what I found under a big stone. That's right a furry veggie chewer. He got away, for now.

(Enfield NH) Garlic is up 2 to 3 inches. Deer are feasting on parsnips. Just starting eggplant and peppers for the field. Greenhouse is getting full with onions, greens. Have an unheated tunnel planted to early greens to see how that works. Field is still wet but drying fast.

(Grand Isle) What a joy to have this warm weather to get things done outside. The asparagus is still hidden but we know things are happening underground. We have seeded down the spring salad mix, spinach, radishes, and peas. We hope to pop in the seed potatoes any day now. The most recent mechanical adaptation we are trying is to our set of 3 planet juniors on our tool bar. We are tired of lifting them up so often to get rid of trash weed build up so we have added small disc openers to the forward portion of the planting shoes. So far so good for planting with the recent soil conditions that we have had. As a side note, we are seeing possums in our area and this seems new for our northern area.

(Westminster West) Well, can it be too hot for first of April? We're about 3 weeks ahead weather wise. Garlic is fully up and we top dressed it all this weekend. Winter rye is greening up well and will plow it in shortly. Greenhouse sales have been fine, pansies have sold well as are the herbs. Full crew transplanting as fast as we can and with the new extra greenhouse space, it actually has somewhere to go! Added several major new accounts and feeling the added pressure that it brings, not sure if it's worth it but I will worry about that when I find the time. Usual assortment of insects in houses but we're keeping it under control well; very little disease pressure so far due to sunny and warm days.

(Craftsbury) Field prep and planting is a full 2 weeks ahead of any previous records, I'm tickled pink. Makes me realize how compressed and stressful normal springs are and how the quantity of work is not that ridiculous with just a little more time. Of course this leads to taking on more projects such as planting 1000 blueberry plants but I guess that is the addiction.

(Fairfax) We're still packing out carrots and beets from storage and planting spinach in the field on the earliest date for us in nearly 20 years. We have had great storage this year. One tip which we got from Andy Jones was getting the fans on the evaporated wired so they only run when the compressor runs. That works great once the root crops have been brought down to storage temperature. That coupled with the new style netafim foggers has really kept the roots in great condition.

(Norwich) Pretty strange weather! Put big covers on half acre overwintered spinach but plants outside cover look about the same. Might be picking in a matter of days; earliest ever. Took covers off plasticulture berries to cool them down a little. Flower buds visible in crowns could be big trouble with return of cold. Started drip on berries. Putting out plugs of greens and having to set up irrigation to water in. Underseeding sweetclover in winter rye. Greenhouse tomatoes on second cluster with 1 inch diameter first fruit. Customers showing up in greenhouses looking for bedding plants. Don't they know this is Vermont!?

(Shaftsbury) Chisel plowing and planting cover crop of pea/triticale or oats on some fall crop land that did not get any winter cover. Also chisel plowing some early spring crop land to warm up the soil before planting. Definitely had some slow and poor germination on two year old pepper seeds. Uncovered strawberries 10 days ago and they look pretty good. Amazing weather cutting down on greenhouse fuel costs so far.

(Westfield) Zero degrees one week, 80 the next; it is hard to know what to do. Bedding plants and greens are looking good and there is plenty of sunshine for growing. We planted the first batch of tomatoes in the greenhouse, and tomorrow we will start pulling the mulch off the strawberries.

(Durham CT) Spinach remains our mainstay; we did our first outdoor planting of Bordeaux spinach last Friday, which seems earlier than ever. Every year there seems to be this mad scramble to get more greens planted so that we can start harvesting them before all the greens in the hoopouses get finished; this year is not any different. We planted our first tomato house, this is the only one with heat. Lots of Sungolds, Cherokee Purples and Juliets, to name a few. We're ready to with spinosad spray to help tackle the inevitable onslaught of cutworms. A definite drawback of overworking a house is the residual greenery that will attract the worms and aphids. The first year of this resulted in many tomato plants cut in two. However, the spinosad is working at almost 100 percent effectiveness. Our low tunnels have proven themselves this spring.

We've been harvesting baby lettuce for three weeks now. this is out of an early November planting. These plants stayed sturdy and small all winter and have just recently started to grow. Carrots and chard have a great jump on the spring. The greenery on the carrots is well established and the chard is big enough to be sold as baby greens. Samish and 7 green spinach in these tunnels have also been a success. The only dud was mizuna, it went to seed too quickly. I should have known better, that's the nature of overwintered Brassicas.

TRACTORS 101 WORKSHOPS

New farmers will have the opportunity to learn how to use and maintain tractors safely at two workshops to be held in Randolph Center and Montpelier, Vermont. Topics covered include: tractor safety, information on purchasing new and used equipment, and hands-on time driving tractors and learning about different makes and models. Registration is required as space is limited to 10 participants per workshop. Cost is \$35. To register go to <http://tinyurl.com/UVMtractors101> or call 223-2389 x 203, or email newfarmer@uvm.edu. Participants should come prepared for the weather, bring a bag dinner, and wear sturdy shoes, gloves, and work clothes. Dates and locations: April 27, 4-7 p.m Vermont Technical College, Randolph Center. (Registration deadline: April 21.) May 11, 4-7 p.m. Harvest Equipment, Montpelier. (Registration deadline: May 5.)

TRAINING AND INITIAL EXAM FOR PESTICIDE APPLICATORS

If you apply pesticides, or if you want to be able to train your workers to meet the Worker protection Standards, you should have an applicator's license. See all the rules and regs about this at: <http://www.vermontagriculture.com/ARMES/pest.htm>. On April 13 at Vermont Tech there will be a review of Vermont pesticide regulations and the information covered in the Pesticide Applicator Training Manual that is necessary to understand and to pass the VT pesticide certification license exam. The Core exam will be given after the training, from 2-5pm. (No category exams will be given but can be scheduled with VAA for a later date.) It is necessary to study the Core manual BEFORE the training to have the knowledge necessary to pass the exam. Manuals can be purchased in advance from VT Agency of Agriculture for \$33.00. Call Matt Wood at 828-3482. To register for the training contact Ann Hazelrigg at (802) 656-0493 or ann.hazelrigg@uvm.edu.

USING BENEFICIAL INSECTS IN HIGH TUNNELS

On April 20 at 10 am IPM Specialist Dr. Betsy Lamb will lead growers in this hands-on workshop at Kilpatrick Family Farm, 9778 Route 22 in Middle Granville NY (just a few miles west of Wells, VT). The use of beneficial insects as a means to control pest insects in high tunnels and greenhouses will be discussed. Understanding placement, handling and life cycles of the beneficial insects is just as important as understanding the pest insects. Microscopes and insects will be available. Additionally, Michael Kilpatrick will give a brief tour of the high and low tunnel production areas of his farm. Cost is \$10 per person; make check payable to CCE Rensselaer County, and mail with your name and contact info to CCE Washington County, 415 Lower Main Street, Hudson Falls, NY 12839. Please register by April 15th. Call 518-746-2562 or email cdb13@cornell.edu for more information.