



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 16, 2017
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Williston) I just received my hoophouse soil test results back from UMaine. I had taken the plastic off last fall for a few reasons, one of which was the salt levels had been steadily going up over the past 5 years. Here are the numbers. 2013: 2.01, 2014: 2.47, 2015: 4.02, 2016: 5.15, 2017: 0.65 (after fall/winter without plastic). You can see the salt level went from 5.15, which is high, to 0.65, which is low.

I put the plastic back on with help from Mike Feiner of Vine Ripe Greenhouse Construction. We got a near windless morning to put it on and the soil is now drying out and ready to be fertilized. I will be growing cherry tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes and eggplant this summer. Garlic outside is looking great which was planted on black plastic last fall with straw on half of the rows for frost protection and comparison. We had a mild winter so there was no difference in growth in the unmulched garlic. Now we just need some sun and warmth.

(E. Montpelier) Too wet to get necessary field activity accomplished!

(Orwell) This cool and rainy spring has made us more appreciative than ever to have the ability to grow under cover. Our clay soils are greasy and have been virtually impossible to get a tractor onto, with the exception of a brief window 2 weeks ago. But under cover the tomatoes and peppers soak up the solar radiation and seem to be fending off the diseases associated with cool cloudy weather. We have seen what we think is a mild infestation of wire worms munching away on the stems of newly transplanted tomatoes.

We pushed through a few cold nights running back up heaters, hopefully we are nearing the end of frosty times. We love having automated ventilation in our new hoophouse and are anxious to have that installed across the board--imagine being able to leave for a day (or two??) and not worrying the whole time!

(Rochester) Finally completing blueberry pruning, in mid-May, damp weather keeping our pace slow. Koppert bumblebees are in place and should have plenty to blossoms to work on once they open up. The flower formation is very good in all varieties this year.

(Grand Isle) We have an idea for any farm where workers are doing harvesting with containers on the hip that are attached to a belt at the waist. In this situation, we are finding the addition of "padded construction suspenders" of great help for properly distributing weight of the crop and saving those tender back muscles. We bought some from a company called Kuny's Tool Works, but I imagine different companies make them.

(Passumpsic) Not a great year to scale back the use of early season row cover. In other news, we had a huge deer problem with spring- and fall-planted berries on plastic mulched with straw. However, many plants that were munched right to the crown have grown out of the damage and are unrecognizable from the undamaged plants. We are feeding two gallons an acre of Neptune's Harvest through the drip every week to ten days along with a bit of epsom salts, boron, and Azomite. The plants seem to be responding well, but with the cold start to May it's too early to tell. Clery CIV would normally be in full bloom right now, but we are at less than 5 percent.

We have been having trouble with the amount of sediment in the river and our double disc filtration system. It has gotten better, but initially it was impossible to fertigate as the disc filters would clog in under 5 minutes. It's a reminder that if you are going to do early season fertigation from a river at near flood stage, you are going to need filtration above and beyond what is required for a normal drip system.

We are doing a better job hardening off plants this year. We use 3' by 8' benches from an old propagation house. They work great because you can take them right out through the roll up side of a Ledgewood house and back in with two people. When it is time to go to the field three of them fit on a full size pick up and away you go.

We are feeling great about our crew this year, which while not really newsworthy, seems worth reporting given the recent pessimism around labor at some of the winter conferences. There are definitely some great people out there who are excited to work on small veg and berry farms!

(Salisbury NH) Got all the onions and leeks planted, in-between rains. Direct seeded lettuces are very slow to come up with this cold weather. Wildfire mix came up the quickest. Spinach is loving the cool rainy weather. Reflect spinach from Johnny's seems to be a pretty good grower. Used to love Tyee and Space. Still planting Space with okay results. Potatoes are starting to poke through. Peas are up as well. Have liked results from our sub-soiler and it really has helped areas where water might build up/run off. Still having issues timing end of spinach etc. in hoop house with produce being ready in the field. Soil blocks have helped by being able to start things even when the weather outside doesn't allow us on the gardens. Weather is supposed to change this week and hopefully everything will pop.

(Argyle NY) We are having a pretty normal spring here with slightly above normal temperatures and average rain. This has kept us on track with seedings and transplanting but irrigation is all set up to catch the dry times. This last storm only gave us 0.4" so glad for the irrigation as we go into a hot stretch at the end of the week. Slight frost last week but we were ready with three layers of covers on the strawberries. Clear sailing now with onions planted and no sign off frost in the future. Tunnels are winding down with transition to outdoors happening next week. Farmers' markets doing well.

Those pesky cabbage aphids are showing up on our overwintered kale and I hope I can control them soon. No sign of downy mildew in spinach but see some Cladisporium in the tunnel. Waiting for the mustards to bloom before we plant potatoes to ward off scab; it's worked in the past. We are scrambling like others to find sweet potatoes but might try to grow a few slips ourselves.

(Plainfield NH) Lack of sun, damp weather and snow last Sunday with mid-80's forecast for mid-week; we are getting the full spectrum of conditions. Sales at the greenhouse are ok considering the uninspiring weather for gardening, as my wife pointed out "It's hard for gardeners to produce sales at the checkout when they have to take off their ski gloves to get it out of their ski parkas."

Fortunately, we have sandy soils on enough of the farm that we are taking advantage of the moisture and transplanting; early cucurbits and peppers going out, and early plantings of cole crops, lettuce, beet, onion and fennel out as well. Concerned about cabbage maggot as this is the weather for it, but it is always risky with early cole crops. Pea and oat covers are now up. Raspberries leafing out nicely and looking like very little winter injury this year, and blues budding up and getting ready to flower despite the cool temps.

Strawberries look ok, but are way behind with buds barely breaking out of the crown, if at all. Some of them are on heavier ground, and I see water in the wheel tracks after the rains and that concerns me, even though I have no red stele prone varieties in the field, I am keeping my fingers crossed we are not getting set up for root pathogens in those areas. This year there have been negligible walk-ins looking for summer employment, and the few that do seem to want 20 hours a week max, mostly in the farm kitchen and greenhouses.

DOWNY MILDEW FOUND IN BRASSICA SEEDLINGS

Meg McGrath, Cornell Cooperative Extension

Kale, collards, and kohlrabi transplants were confirmed to have downy mildew at two farms in NY recently. This is not the same pathogen that affects spinach. Cotyledons had tiny black spots and a few true leaves had the irregular black pattern symptom that characterizes this disease.

White downy sporulation of the pathogen was observed on the underside of cotyledons. I have photographs from the last time I saw on seedlings several years ago posted at:

<http://livegpath.cals.cornell.edu/gallery/crucifers-cole-crops/downy-mildew-on-cabbage/>

This disease is rare during spring in the Northeast. It usually occurs in fall when wind-dispersed spores have become common. All growers with Brassica crops should inspect them for symptoms. Early in the day is the best time to find spores. When downy mildew is found prior to transplanting, it is recommended the plants be thrown out as will be difficult to control and probably not worth the cost of the necessary fungicide applications to produce the crop. Cool, wet conditions recently have been very favorable. Disease development will be slowed once conditions become hot and dry. I am interested to know how widespread this downy mildew is occurring this spring, so please send me an e-mail if you have on your plants mtm3@cornell.edu.

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