



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – November 7, 2011
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<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry>

QUESTIONS FROM THE FIELD

When should I mulch strawberries for the winter?

A fact sheet from Cornell cites research that suggests that a good timing guide is to apply mulch after three consecutive days with a soil temperature in the root zone of 40°F or below. This soil temperature usually occurs after multiple frosts, and when the plants have slowed growth in response to cooler temperatures. It is best to apply mulch before the soil freezes solid. So, in New England, mulches are usually applied in late November.

When is the best time to cut fall-bearing raspberry canes and prune summer raspberries?

According to the Raspberry and Blackberry Production Guide (NRAES-35) carbohydrates move from plant leaves into the crown in autumn and then from the crown to buds in early spring. If canes are cut before all the carbohydrates reach the crown in autumn, the new canes may not be as vigorous the following year. Canes can also be cut too late, after carbohydrates have moved into the buds of new canes in the spring. From December through February most carbohydrates are in the crown, so this is the best time to cut canes. When thinning summer-bearing raspberries, it is a good idea to wait until mid-March, so that any winter injury on the tops of second-year floricanes can be identified and removed. Pruning to three to five large canes per linear foot of row is ideal with row width of 12 inches and 9 feet between rows.

How should I prune my blueberries?

Blueberries should be pruned moderately every year to promote consistent production of new canes and highest productivity. If you wait several years then flushes of young canes are produced after heavy pruning, leading to erratic yields. Early spring is the best time to prune blueberries because it allows carbohydrates produced in the fall to move into the roots and crown and it also allows winter injury to be observed and thus pruned out. On young bushes remove flower buds for the first two years by rubbing off the fruit buds or cutting off the tips of shoots, where the flower buds are. At the beginning of the third year, remove any twisted or low-growing canes. Only the 2 or 3 healthiest new canes that grow each year should be left in place until the plants are about 8 years old and fully grown.

At this time, the oldest couple of canes should be removed each year. Canes more than an inch in diameter are not as productive as younger canes. When pruning, start by removing winter-injured, broken, or diseased canes, and those that are rubbing on other canes, short and spindly, or sticking out into alleyways. Cut canes close to the crown without leaving stubs since these can be a source of disease inoculum.

Do I have to register and inspect my Vermont farm truck?

No, and yes. According to state statute T 23 VSA 4(72) which you can read at:

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/fullsection.cfm?Title=23&Chapter=007&Section=00370>

"Farm Trucks" by definition can either be registered or unregistered at the option of the owner. However, Patrick J. McManamon of the VT Department of Motor Vehicles, Enforcement and Safety Division provided the following clarification: If the "Farm Truck" is not registered pursuant to T 23 VSA 370 (b) it is limited in its use. The vehicle can only be used on a highway to go from farm to field, field to field, field to farm or farm to farm. It also cannot be used for hire. Though it is true that if a "Farm Truck" is unregistered it cannot be inspected however, the truck must be inspectable. In other words the truck must meet the requirements to pass a Vermont State Inspection. Nowhere in T 23 does it exempt a "Farm Truck" from meeting the requirements of an inspection and/ or insurance. So the short answer would be that the truck does not have to be registered but if it is unable to meet the requirements of an inspection it cannot be operated on a public highway.

What are the considerations of polycarbonate vs. double poly plastic greenhouse covering?

(From John Bartok, Univ. of CT greenhouse engineer emeritus) The initial cost of double poly is about \$0.10/sq. ft. and the life is 4 years. Some growers get as much as 6 years but light transmission declines due to dust and smog so most growers change it more frequently. Estimated cost per year for covering a 26' x 96' hoophouse is about \$400 (\$250 for the poly and \$150 electricity for the blower). The initial cost of poly carbonate is about \$3/sq. ft. installed and the life is 20 years. It needs to be cleaned every year to remove dust and smog. Like the better poly films, it has IR and anti-drip included in formulation. Estimated cost for 26' x 96' hoophouse is \$800/year. Polycarbonate is usually used for garden center greenhouses as it doesn't have to be replaced and has a clean appearance. It is not very common on production greenhouses except on the gutter-connected structures that are more difficult to cover with poly. G.E. Lexan Thermoclear Plus has a 10 year warranty with 2% light loss and 2% yellowing. It has been used in Europe for 29 years. G.E. Softlite Lexan Thermoclear Plus is the same material but gives a more uniform light on the plants and reduces the need for shading. Both are available from Griffin Greenhouse www.griffins.com or 800-888-0054. Palram Americas Thermaglas SLT is a similar material with diffusion, available from: www.green-tek.com or 800-747-6440.

Is it true that I can buy wasps to help control European corn borer in sweet corn?

Yes, a tiny wasp called *Trichogramma ostriniae* lays its eggs inside the egg masses of ECB, killing them before they can hatch. Unparasitized ECB eggs turn from a cream color to white with a black spot but when parasitized the eggs turn black. The wasps then emerge and search for more egg masses in the field to lay eggs in. They don't overwinter but they will reproduce and contribute to the control of ECB throughout the season, in both sweet corn (and bell peppers). Knowing when ECB flight begins is key to timing the *Trichogramma* releases. Setting up pheromone traps, available from Gemplers or Great Lakes IPM, can help monitor ECB moth flights, or you can guess and release wasps once corn is a foot tall. Release *T. ostriniae* once a week for several weeks at 30,000-60,000 wasps per acre each time. The cost is \$16-\$32 plus shipping. The wasps need to be reared in advance so remember to order them from IPM Laboratories in Locke, NY as soon as you plant your corn or peppers next spring; 315-497-2063 or www.ipmlabs.com.

Where can I get help resolving an insurance claim I submitted after the flooding from Irene?

The Vermont Ag Mediation Program (vtamp.emcenter.org) offers assistance to farmers on: problems with insurance claims, inability to meet NRCS conditions for cost share programs, cash flow problems with creditors, wetlands issues, foreclosures, loan application denials. Contact Matt or Julie at VTAMP at 802-583-1100 or matts@emcenter.org

Can I still get early registration for the New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference?

Yes, early registration ends Nov. 30, and you can register on-line at www.newenglandvfc.org. The fee is \$95 for the first person from your farm and \$65 for each additional person for any or all 3 days. These rates increase by \$30 per person for late or at-the-door registrations.

REMEMBERING NANCY CHRISTOPHER

Nancy Christopher, owner of Lakeside Berry Farm in Alburg will be missed as she passed away last month. She was a long time member of the Vermont vegetable and berry growers association and for several years served on the board of directors. She had been a state legislator and while on our board she kept our organization informed of relevant bills and hearings. She had a green thumb and supplemented it with good information; for example she used leaf analysis every year to manage her productive raspberry crops. Our condolences go to Ed C. and his family.