



## Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 22, 2011

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### REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Grand Isle) On March 18th enough of this winter's snow had receded so that we were able to walk the fields and inspect our farm. We were pleased to find that the mulched strawberries, garlic, campanula, and sweet Williams survived beautifully under the thick blanket of snow. The winter rye stand looks top notch. Spinach and Tango lettuce that were still in the field from last year look like they will take off and grow once they get some more warmth, sunlight, and a deer fence. We unearthed a few tasty carrots. As far as greenhouse work, we are busy putting our grafted tomato plants into 6 inch pots and seeding down leeks, peppers, and eggplants.

(Plainfield NH) Our focus is on greenhouse activities; we're getting the first greenhouse tomatoes in the ground. Tomato grafting continues along with the full complement of other ornamental and vegetable greenhouse chores. Battling mealybug and thrips populations in the overwintered stock plant houses, banking on parasitic nematodes as the back bone of the thrips counter attacks and trying various new strategies such as Cryptolaemous, which was expensive and ineffective for us. No fruit pruning done yet due to the snow depth in the fields, but much snow pack deleted with the recent warm southerly flow of air; hopefully will commence pruning peaches and blueberries in the coming week.

(Durham CT) This year is starting different from other years. For one thing, we are beginning to put back together our greenhouses that had severe winter damage. Not an uncommon occurrence for many of us this past season. We saw our largest house (30 x 144) fold up onto itself at the end of January. The other four houses (30 x 96) are now all re-covered. When it became apparent that there was nowhere for the snow to go we slit the plastic in numerous places to allow all that weight to fall on our winter greens. The first two houses of this group were re-covered three weeks ago, which resulted in a quick melt of all the snow in there and a re-emergence of the spinach. Kale and other Brassicas did not fare as well. They didn't totally die off, but clearly suffered from being under a foot of snow for too long. Claytonia, slower to take off, has begun to gain momentum. Ironically, the largest house remained accessible except for the very middle where the hoops had folded in. Because of this, we have been able to harvest spinach and salad greens in there for our farmers' markets. Spinach and claytonia are the greens that will get you thru a cold winter. Johnny's Five Star Greenhouse Lettuce has also proven a winner by coming on strong at the middle of February. In order to make this lettuce work, it needs to be started mid November. As a small, close to the ground plant, it survives cold weather no problem. We've been grafting tomatoes with great success this year. In past years we'd tried to do this with minimal success. The key to getting good grafts is having an excellent hospital for them to recover in, a good match of rootstock and scion and perhaps making one's cut straight across. Richard McAvoy at UConn made this suggestion to us, and it seems to work better.

(Hoosick Falls NY) Winter greens are doing great, harvesting spinach chard, bok choi, and lettuce. Found a small patch with aphids, but not a terrible amount. Our saturated ground caused some worry in the hoop house seeded for Spring, but once the water table receded and we did a little hoeing, all is well. Alliums are thriving in the greenhouse, starting all from seed this year; we are tired of buying inconsistent onion plants, and last year's experiment growing a few of our own during a bad summer was highly successful. Pansies and geraniums have settled in nicely, next week all of the basket and bedding plugs arrive.

(Westminster West) Well, winter's back; I expected this snowstorm really. It was amazing watching the effects of the super moon on the germination rates on seeds the past few weeks. Fast running out of room for new transplants, opening our last house tomorrow but I know that will fill fast as well. Glad I ordered our pots and trays last year; the price increases due to the oil costs are huge. Having good success blending Rootshield into all of our soil mixes this year as well as marked decreases from insects due to our biocontrol releases. Early delivered goods are selling well at stores and we will be ramping up deliveries next week to include Pansies and violas along with our herbs. A couple of new tools I purchased have given me nice results: a battery operated back pack sprayer by Dramm is a wonderful tool and very convenient. I purchased mine from Griffin but it might be available elsewhere as well. The other neat thing is a hand held laser temperature gauge. It's really handy for checking on soil temps all over the greenhouse as well as finding cold leaks around the structure; about 80 bucks from Growers Supply.

(Granville NY) Snow is going fast; the crew has been hard at work cleaning up around the greenhouses and pulling tomato stakes, drip tape and rowcovers out in the field. Greenhouses are finally going strong due to the beautiful weather. Field-overwintered Jerusalem artichokes, spinach, and carrots came through great; should have covered the carrots a little earlier as we are seeing a little freeze damage and rot in them. Peeked at the overwintered onions in the field and they seem to be growing at least! Seeing significant dieback in some winter rye. Grafted tomato transplants from Wishing Stone Farm in RI are looking great; they will be transplanted out in a couple of weeks. Bought a few new toys: a waterwheel planter, Teagle bale shredder for spreading straw mulch and 200L water reel; these should increase efficiency on the farm.

(Fair Haven) The big March storm had us wondering if spring was ever going to come. However, recent warm days had everything melting fast though the snow is 6+ inches deep. We are getting ready to finalize our planting scheme for the year and plan our pick-up days for orchard plants. We are going conservative on the expansion projects this year. We had expensive equipment and barn repairs and now are trying to tighten our belts a little until we recoup.

(Sudbury) Fields are still too wet from melting snow. We have planted kale, spinach, chard and lettuce in our cold greenhouse. Busy times are soon approaching although it is snowing again!

(Little Compton RI) As we do this winter growing, new issues come up. Just as timing is everything for starting seeds in proper succession in October and November; in a similar way re-entering the high growth period of late February and March requires forethought.

It will be a major part of our growing program in 2012 to monitor bug populations in early February. We've had an unbelievable explosion of aphids and other pests in the last three weeks. If we had scouted more diligently earlier they might not have snuck up on us. We lost the battle in one house and had to tear all the greens out. Luckily it was destined for greenhouse tomatoes so it may have been a blessing in disguise getting it cleaned up early. We only have potatoes, carrots and salad mix now at our Saturday market, a far cry from what we had in January.

(Enfield NH) The fields are beginning to show through the snow, but just barely. The overwintered greens just started producing. I took kale, mustard, chard, and spinach to market over the weekend. One greenhouse overwintered very well with one layer of plastic, and 1 to 3 layers of different row coverings. The other is 1 to 2 weeks behind the first, and I am unclear why. We had the same coverings in each house. The house that did not do as well was a taller house, so I think that it was colder. I hope to have thermometers in all houses next year so that question is answered. I am also considering 2 layers of plastic and an inflation fan for the future to keep the temperatures from being as low. Onions, shallots and leeks are seeded in the greenhouse, as well as first plantings of lettuce, kale, chard, and a few others. Just starting the first tomatoes.

(Underhill) The blueberries appear to have made it through the winter in good shape. Can't be sure since there is still a foot of snow around the plants, down from 3 feet. With our age goes strength, endurance, agility, and more. To somewhat compensate we use chairs when pruning the bushes; inexpensive plastic patio type. We find it easier to bend from a sitting position than to get up from a kneeling position.

(Salisbury NH) Things are really starting to grow finally. Temps are getting too hot in the hoophouse. We don't have enough vents and can't afford automatic anything at this point. Yesterday registered 85 degrees with the door open. Soil temperature drops to around 40 from cold nights but yesterday it was up to around 55. The spinach that was planted late (Sept. 30) made it through winter but the backside of the leaves look funny; perhaps due to the freeze/thaw cycle. The new leaves had nice color but also looked like some mildew. Cut back most of the growth, which the chickens happily ate; we'll see what regrowth looks like. Seeds planted Feb. 19 germinated and look promising: radishes, spinach, Bright Lights chard. The overwintered carrots had shoulders pushed up from the soil and a punky texture. Not sure the best way to overwinter them (heavy row cover?). Rather than spend a lot of energy trying to overwinter things, we're thinking of just extending the season in fall and then getting an early jump in spring. We should have lettuce in good supply by mid to late April which is much better than what we could accomplish outside.

## **INITIAL PESTICIDE APPLICATOR CERTIFICATION MEETING AND EXAM**

This meeting will take place April 7 at Vermont Technical College, Randolph Center starting at 9 am. It will provide training and 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 this training, from 2 to 4 pm.

It is necessary to study the Core manual BEFORE the training to have all 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 look at the study materials for the course go to <http://pss.uvm.edu/pesp/>. This does NOT replace purchase and reading of the Core manual. Pre-registration for the meeting cost \$20 and is due by March 30. More information: Ann Hazelrigg (802) 656-0493 or [ann.hazelrigg@uvm.edu](mailto:ann.hazelrigg@uvm.edu).

## **INTERNS AVAILABLE FOR FOOD AND FARM BUSINESSES**

The Vermont Intern Program through Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibilities (VBSR) can help you attract new talent, complete short term projects, and evaluate long term employment potential. You don't need to be a VBSR member to participate. VBSR will post your intern project and recruit the best interns throughout the state; these are paid internships. Students get to explore opportunities, learn socially responsible business practices, and gain valuable work experience. The Vermont Intern Program has already placed about 100 interns and has a 98% successful retention rate. To learn more about the program go to [www.vbsr.org](http://www.vbsr.org) and click on the 'intern program' tab on the left. For more info: Andrea Cohen 802-862-8347 or [andreac@vbsr.org](mailto:andreac@vbsr.org).