



## **Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 27, 2012**

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, [vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu](mailto:vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu)

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry>

### **REPORTS FROM THE FIELD**

(Benson) This unexpected warm weather window has propelled us from March chores to our usual April tasks. We direct seeded radishes, four turnip varieties, scallions, lots of beets, and the first carrot seeding which is about two weeks ahead of best expectations. In addition, we transplanted spinach, chard, Asian greens and will put in lots of set onions early next week with the soil being ready for all. I presume we will have to do lots of covering later but that is ok. If we can get germination and a bit of an established root system these plants will do just fine. Winter markets are still very strong even though we ran out of carrots and rutabagas this week. More greens than we can sell right now but we could have worse problems. It seems we will have to set irrigation next week.

(Cambridge) I plowed up the field and put in a cover crop of peas and oats; definitely a first in March. I don't know if it will amount to anything before I plant crops in late May but the field was dry and I couldn't resist experimenting. Everything else to report is worrisome to bad. The bad news is we had our last boil last night which leaves us with half a crop of maple syrup. Even in our northern region, at high elevation, the trees are budding out. I imagine that will be similar to most other sugar makers in the state. The worrisome parts are the questions about the other perennial crops. Are the blueberries going to be flowering way too soon? What about the fruit trees? Are we going to see a huge insect problem this year? The onions are looking good in the greenhouse and the garlic is coming up nicely but that is the only positive news I have to report at the moment.

(Starksboro) I planted peas at the beginning of that March warm spell. By the time things cooled down, the roots were out but the cotyledons had not expanded yet. We'll see if they amount to anything. Otherwise, it's great getting miscellaneous projects and cleanup done, above and beyond the normal greenhouse work.

(Rochester) A week of May-like weather launched us into blueberry and raspberry pruning at a frenzied pace. The farm always looks beautiful as it emerges from the winter and it feels good to get going for the season. But the Patriots started to break bud and some of the brambles are leafing out. With night temperatures in the teens this week we think the blueberries should endure but we have seen post-dormant raspberry canes compromised by hard frosts before and are nervous. We can cover some young raspberries but will leave the oldest, tallest sections to their fate.

(Westminster) My first entry in last year's farm journal on 3/3/11 was "One of the worst winters we've had in a long, long time". What a difference a year makes. Winter rye is growing nicely, the clover cover crop sowed with the now dead oats, is doing well. I uncovered 2,000 of the 5,000 strawberry plants planted last year. The plants with the least straw on top of them have healthier greener conditions. Arugula should be ready for sale next week and spinach the next week after that; both from unheated hoop-houses. Will be seeding another house in spinach next week. I hope the asparagus doesn't emerge too early with this heat. Looking out my window at the fat buds on the apple tree. Weird.

(Plainfield NH) The hot days have done some drying of the fields that flooded, but we still haven't gotten over the financial and psychological loss, so there is a much reduced planting plan for this year. But trays are coming up in the greenhouse, changing lots of things to paper pots, new cultivators for the 100, and whole rows of garlic coming through the mulch! Spring...

(S. Burlington) Winter crops growing amazingly with last week's summer weather. New crops also coming along much faster than normal so there shouldn't be much lag time between winter kale/spinach and spring kale/spinach. Have been able to prep outside beds because of the weather. We'll see how this week's normal temps affect things but I don't think it will do much to the hoophouse crops.

(Fairfax) Actually baled straw last week. We had grown July-seeded Sudax, thinking we needed more straw. Mowed and raked it after a hard freeze last fall. There was so much moisture in the stem we decided to leave it till Spring. It baled beautifully this week. Nice 200 bales to add to thin mulch areas in the berries. Probably something we will try again.

(Plainfield NH) Around here it looked more like the 25th of April than of March 25. Lilac and red maple buds are swollen, sugaring been done for a week. We got the mulch off strawberries then sidedressed some chicken 5-3-4 and in that time the plants grew out dramatically.

Because this is normally greenhouse season only, we haven't been able to take advantage of early tillage and planting, in part because we were watering like mad this past week. One of my fields has a haze of redroot pigweed up! Pruning blueberries is complete, we need to tip back the raspberries. Prepping in the tomato greenhouses and planting a bit earlier than usual due to better luck with grafting. Will start manuring raspberries and some bare ground this week, No major pest problems in the greenhouses, yet.

(West Rutland) The ticks are out, pulled one out of my back the other day. Several of my friends contracted Lyme disease and then got the cure; good luck keeping up 12 hour days if you get the disease because the medicine kicks the crap out of you. Garlic is up too high for my liking. I am concerned about cold weather coming back and freezing the crop. Planting some hops this year. Of course, the hoofed ones are known to attack hops, so I got a new bottle of Shooters Choice and gave "the preacher" a good cleaning. Who knows, could be that less hoofs equals less ticks and a full freezer.

(Grand Isle) Most of our time has been spent seeding in the greenhouse and finishing up those winter projects that seem to linger into spring time. We have our grafted tomatoes in 6 inch pots and they are growing well. We will move them to a final house in two weeks or less. We raked the straw mulch off the strawberries, sweet williams, campanula, and shasta daisies on March 18th. The garlic is all coming up fine which is good since it never got mulch last November. At dusk yesterday a huge barred owl with sat on a utility wire by one of our fields. We indicated that she could have all the voles she wanted.

(Westminster West) It's been super unseasonal but we haven't changed our plans, as the weather can always go bad. It is great to see the winter rye greening up and growing along with the garlic crop, which we top dressed with N to keep growing, and did a bit of weeding. Bug control in all the greenhouses are looking good with the good predator bugs working overtime. Pansies are starting to bloom so we will start shipping for Easter! We have had a hard time finding people that want to work full time; amazing, but most people we interview only want part time work! Gearing up for a busy season and spent the very windy day getting greenhouses ready for freezing weather. Very dry and already had to start using back up well for water. Looking forward to plowing and getting fields ready next week for the real growing season.

(Little Compton RI) We left a third of our carrots in the ground to overwinter them, #1 because we couldn't fit anything in the cooler after harvesting all the other root crops in December and #2 there is no comparison between a fresh winter-frosted fresh carrot in March and a carrot that has been sitting in limbo at 34 degrees. We beat or cut off the tops and then cover them with a heavy dense row cover and then some dead greenhouse plastic. Yes, the voles can do a number on them but it is tolerable. Our overwintered Bridger onions from Johnny's did much better than last year, when we killed them with kindness by providing too much insulation and we also left the covers on too late in March thus they bolted vs. sizing up. In the end, they gave us 1400lb but the bolted core was hard and dry. Spinach is looking great; the deer agree and have eaten most of it. Spargo and Space did best for our greenhouse spinach. Greenhouse winners: Happy Rich was great and didn't get funky with the low light and cold. Black summer and most of the bok chois were real good to great. Cilantro, Yukina Savoy, Red Komamatsuna, Red Rain, Ruby Streaks, Breen lettuce. Greenhouse losers: Red bok choy, Komamatsuna green (it got leggy and yellow), Lacinto Kale (didn't hate it but made better money with other stuff).

### **MONITOR DEGREE DAYS AND PREPARE FOR EARLY INSECT ARRIVAL**

This unusually warm season may cause some insect pests to emerge earlier than usual. Here's the link to a fact sheet from Univ. of Wisconsin that lists the accumulated degree days (measure of seasonal warmth) necessary for the emergence of common vegetable and fruit pests, and it also lists the stage of growth of some indicator plants that reflect certain DD accumulations:

<http://hort.uwex.edu/articles/degree-days-common-fruit-vegetable-insect-pests>

You can monitor DD accumulation at sites across the Northeast including several weather stations around Vermont at: <http://newa.cornell.edu/index.php?page=degree-days>.

### **MODIFY YOUR BACKPACK SPRAYER TO MAKE IT WORK BETTER**

Rutgers University Snyder Research Farm Director John Grande has developed methods to easily modify backpack sprayers to increase their accuracy, improve ease of use, and he has tested them with many organic products. Check out these short videos with companion handouts explaining how to modify backpack sprayers to make them work better. Go to: <http://snyderfarm.rutgers.edu/snyder-backpack-sprayers.html>. The web site also features a PowerPoint with speaker notes and the videos are captioned.

## **GROWING DRY BEANS PRESENTATION**

On April 10th in Montpelier at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library from 6:15-8pm Jack Lazor of Butterworks Farm will be talking about growing dry beans in VT and Joseph Bossen of Vermont Beancrafters will presenting the buyer/processor perspective. The event is free. For more information: [rachel.schattman@uvm.edu](mailto:rachel.schattman@uvm.edu) or 802-656-9140.

## **PRACTICAL FOOD SAFETY WORKSHOP APRIL 12**

Protect your farm's markets and profitability: write a Practical Food Safety Plan. This workshop is aimed at small and diversified farms. It is the second year that UVM Extension is offering a one-day workshop on this topic for produce growers. In the morning, you will learn the specifics of contamination risks on small farms. Then you will identify aspects of your own operation that may need attention. In the afternoon, we will visit Jericho Settler's Farm to observe and discuss their on-farm food safety practices, how they were implemented, and their impact on produce safety and farm management. By the end of the day, you will have created a two-page draft of your own On-Farm Food Safety Plan with specific action-steps needed to implement it. This can be shared with interested retail customers, local and wholesale buyers. If you cannot attend, consider sending your crew leaders. For registration information: [http://www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/Documents/PFS\\_registration\\_v.5\\_apr12.pdf](http://www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/Documents/PFS_registration_v.5_apr12.pdf).