



University of Vermont

Extension

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Vermont Vegetable and Berry Grower News – April 1, 2025

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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Cabot) I can see my fields. Seeds are purchased. One H2A worker is here. Seven more to go. Cleaning up high tunnels. Filling trays. Fixing equipment. Looking out windows. Just waiting to start.

(Newbury) Garlic is up. First planting of shell peas in. Spring garlic planted.

(Dummerston) Just wrapped up another season at the Brattleboro Winter Farmers' Market. Sales have been getting better every year. Customers are very appreciative of fresh, local vegetables available every week all winter. It's amazing there aren't more weekly winter markets in Vermont.

In the high tunnels, newly planted greens are taking off. Over-wintered spinach is producing well but starting to get infested with spinach crown mites which always seem to appear this time of year. Outside in the field, it's still nothing but mud. I'm hoping for some drying weather in order to get starting with spring tillage but not seeing much in the forecast.

(Westminster) We've seeded kale, collards, and cabbage, and are waiting for the fields to dry out to begin transplanting. Usually that's April 15, but we've had a lot of snow and rain, so let's hope the sun comes out soon. The greenhouses look good.

We'll grow fewer greens like lettuce and kale this year with weaker markets for leafy greens, and plan on more root crops. We're still packing out carrots, turnips, rutabagas, daikon radish and watermelon radish – it was a good year in 2024.

There doesn't appear to be any problem with bringing in our H-2A workers; the paperwork is going through. But getting their housing inspected has been a chore -- the Vermont Department of Labor suddenly got stricter. They waited until the last minute to tell us about deficiencies and that was not at all helpful, especially as the season was ramping up.

(Hyde Park) Winter reprise: 6 inches of snow yesterday turning to freezing rain over night. The first round of late winter/early spring trays are moving out of the greenhouse and into the tunnels. Seedling growth has been slow, but greens are taking off in the tunnels now.

Last week was my first sales for the year: overwintered spinach and kale. There was some cold damage as a result of my “no-cover/no worries” experiment this winter and I am still debating whether the extra work picking through leaves in the wash pack now outweighs not having to intensely manage for cold temps/moisture all winter. I think a break from winter management is more valuable.

Tunnel chickweed is a significant challenge. My crew doesn’t return until May, and I don’t have time or desire to deal with it. I experimented with deep compost mulch applied last fall and liked the results. It’s expensive but soil steaming is cumbersome, expensive, and environmentally detrimental so I’ve been reluctant to use it and I’m intimidated by the equipment. If I’m going to spend money to fix the problem, why not do something that will enhance soil health too.

I’m behind on transplanting due to slow growth in the greenhouse, laziness, and having a toddler running around. It’s been a joy getting outside with our little girl, especially in the high tunnels where she picks chickweed, collects rocks, and tries small hand tools! I am thrilled to have the same crew coming back for a third season. Hoping to have more family time off-farm this year.

For outdoor bed prep this winter I simply raked plant debris into the pathways, hoeing any roots, and amending on the bed surface ahead of paper potting. The very cold winter killed most of the fall stuff, so it is primed for this type of management. I typically use a BCS with a PDR but I haven’t started it yet. It is more laborious this way but I don’t mind this time of year when energy is high, and I need to work off the rust and winter weight. Plus every year I feel more guilt about soil disturbance likely due to all the no-till propaganda. I have felt discouraged about the state of our country and the world so I have found joy in getting back to work in the soil.

(Wilmot NH) Moving from the indoor grow lights to the heated greenhouses this weekend - here we go! Plan to hit the ground running with lots of flowers; tomato and herb transplanting into bigger pots, and endless seeding trays. Luckily all the snow is gone with only a tiny bit in the forecast. Excited to get back to full time work and hopefully back into shape soon. It may be a bit of a gamble with NRCS programs in limbo, but moving forward with purchasing 2 new 100-foot high tunnels as a worthwhile investment.

(Hudson NY) Fields are dry in the upper Hudson Valley, with rainfall almost 13 inches below normal. Scary for long term planning, but convenient for getting a jump on spring tillage. We are prepping for spring cover cropping on fields harvested too late last fall. About 12 acres will be seeded to peas or ryegrass and clover in the next week. Potato seedstock is set to be delivered this week, as we mentally prepare for the tillage, fertilization and equipment prep.

Applying 160 yards of mushroom compost in our high tunnels, about 24,000 sq. ft. total. We use this compost because it has a low pH, around 5.5, to help lower our current soil levels which are around 7.5, plus we get an organic matter bump. We have already transplanted peas, seeded radishes, and are preparing to transplant a tunnel of zucchini this week after a cold snap Tuesday night. First round of tunnel tomatoes have been potted up, and the greenhouse is filling with vegetable starts for field planting as well as thousands of plants and pots for retail plant sale which opens Mother's Day weekend.

Still selling sweet potatoes and a few odds and ends. Soon their pallet spaces will be taken up by potato seed and fertilizer. The cycle of life. Just beautiful.

(Little Compton RI) Found a dry weather window and put in some spinach, carrots and beets. Covered with remay. Got 1/2 acre of plastic down and filled with broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi and mixed kale. First potatoes are green sprouting and I hope to plant into black plastic in ten days. Too cold and wet for organic peas outside. First ones are planted in a greenhouse with pole beans.

Ocean out our back door is still only 47 degrees, so we'll hunker down in greenhouses for next three weeks. There's big money in Holland style red peppers so we will have two greenhouses of them this year. Aphids are showing up right on time.

Winter markets were great but the last of our winter squash is gone, and now we wait for enough sunlight to push out our overwintered spinach and box choi.

After 10 years of trying, our town is giving the local farms a variance to have three-person RVs for nine months of the year, to house field help during the summer. See if that helps us find labor, we're trying to stay away from H2A with immigration policy so unpredictable.

BLUEBERRY MANAGEMENT UPDATES

Evan Lentz, UConn Extension Fruit Update

Mummy Berry. Forsythia blooms are just around the corner. This means that we need to make sure to get down a 2-4" layer of mulch on our blueberries if you haven't done so already. Forsythia bloom times coincide with the maturity of the overwintering spores that are currently on the ground under your bushes. We are a bit away from having the conditions required for infection (50-62°F) which makes this the perfect time to apply that mulch.

Pruning. Blueberry Bushes can still be pruned, up until they begin to grow this spring. A quick reference for pruning: Total canes per plant: aim for 18. Maintain 3 canes per 1 year of growth. No canes over 6 years in age. Each year, remove the 3 oldest and select 3 new ones to replace them. Remove any diseased, broken, low or crossing branches. No heading cuts! Note: If you are not getting new shoots generating from the base of your plant, you likely have either a pH issue or need nitrogen.

POLLINATOR SUPPORT REPORT

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension and Spencer Hardy, Vermont Center for Ecostudies

Trees and shrubs of nearby forests or waterway edges provide important April blooming flowers that serve as early food sources for wild and managed bees that also pollinate your crops. Tree and shrub examples include shrub willow, service berry, red maple, and sugar maple, which while some are wind pollinated can still provide pollen and nectar resources to sustain bees and other pollinators before crop bloom. Important fruit pollinators of blueberries, strawberries, and brambles can emerge as early as March from overwintering nests. They include bumble bees, mining bees, mason bees, the unequal cellophane bee, pure green sweat bees, and honeybees.

Check out the “Know Your 5” crop pollinator fact sheets for photos and more details at <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/pollinator-support-resources>

VEGETABLE HIGH TUNNEL NEWSLETTER

The early spring issue of High and Dry: Growing Vegetables in Northern New England High Tunnels is available. Articles include Russet Mites a Tiny Threat to Greenhouse Tomatoes, Improved Summer Tunnel Fertility Management, Pesticides in High Tunnels, The Craze Mite a New Biological Control Agent for High Tunnels, and Parasitic Praon Wasps. Newsletters and related fact sheets are at <https://www.uvm.edu/~htunnel/factsheets.html>

FUNDING FOR FARM WORKER HOUSING

Champlain Housing Trust is accepting applications for the Vermont Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program. The goal of the statewide program is to preserve this important affordable housing resource and to help improve the health and welfare of the farm workforce. The loans, up to \$30,000, will be 0% interest, and forgiven over 10 years if the improved housing is maintained and used for farmworker housing. Repairs/improvements include, but are not limited to wastewater systems, air sealing and insulation, noise mitigation measures, overcrowding relief, food prep and storage improvements, mold remediation, electrical and plumbing upgrades, and roof replacements. More information and the application form are at: <https://www.getahome.org/vermont-farmworker-housing-repair-loan-program/>. Applications accepted on a rolling basis. Questions? Charlie Glassberg, cglassberg@getahome.org, 802-810-8217.

CENSUS OF HORTICULTURE DEADLINE IS APRIL 18

USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service conducts this survey once every five years. **It is the only source of detailed production and sales data for U.S. floriculture, nursery, and specialty crop industries, including greenhouse food crops.** Growers are encouraged to complete their survey either online at accounts.usda.gov or by mail as soon as possible. The online questionnaire is user friendly, accessible on most electronic devices, and saves producers time by calculating totals and automatically skipping questions that do not apply to their operations. For assistance, call toll free 888-424-7828. The same federal law that requires producers to respond also requires NASS to keep all individual information confidential.

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE FOR TEXT OR EMAIL ALERTS FROM USDA

This service enables notifications about program information, eligibility requirements and deadlines from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Risk Management Agency (RMA). You can sign up at farmers.gov/subscribe and choose from topics including disaster assistance, conservation programs, crop insurance, farm loans, and more. Participants may unsubscribe at any time.

VVBGA WINTER GROWER WEBINARS

Wednesdays, noon-1:00 from February 5 - April 30

April 2. Moving water away from fields and tunnels.

April 9. Inter-seeding cover crops and living mulches.

April 16. What you need to know about changes to the Worker Protection Standards.

April 23. Brassica pests and diseases.

April 30. Neonicotinoid pesticide restrictions in Vermont.

The full line up is at <https://go.uvm.edu/webinars2025> including links to recordings of past webinars. Attendance is free, but please pre-register at <https://go.uvm.edu/webinar-registration> to receive the Zoom link to join.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS - 2025 ON-FARM WORKSHOPS

UVM Extension and the VVBGA are pleased to share this year's schedule of monthly workshops. To see the details for each meeting, go to <https://go.uvm.edu/2025farmworkshops>. These are free for VVBGA member farms, \$10 all others.

BLUEBERRY PLANT HEALTH AND POLLINATORS. Wednesday May 21, 4:00-6:30 pm.
Wildwood Blueberry Farm, Dorset

GREENHOUSE TOMATOES, PLASTICULTURE STRAWBERRIES, AND A NEW PACKSHED. Tuesday June 17, 4:00-6:30 pm. Crossroad Farm, Fairlee

ADAPTING TO FLOODING AND WHOLESALE VEGETABLE PRODUCTION. Tuesday July 22, 4:00-6:30 pm River Berry Farm, Fairfax

SOIL HEALTH AND SCALING UP FOR WHOLESALE. Tuesday August 5, 4:00-6:30 pm.
Clearfield Farm, Granville

ORGANIC MEDICINAL HERB PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING. Tuesday September 23, 3:00-5:30 pm. Hillside Botanicals, Randolph

HIGH TUNNELS FOR YEAR-ROUND ORGANIC VEGETABLE PRODUCTION
Tuesday October 14, 3:00-5:30 pm. Intervale Community Farm, Burlington