



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 15, 2014
compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) The spinach is finally harvestable one month later than normal from the passive solar houses. The house with the symphylans has them returning in 2 beds out of 5 so far. We check daily. Now for the weird news: the spinach looks like a 16 year old going through a growth spurt. Leaves are nice and thick, taste is great, good dark green color but I get the impression they are trying to make up for losing the month of March. They do not completely unfurl and look a bit crumbled. I have checked them for mites, etc. Nothing there. Seedling house is up and running but we are way behind any other year. Snow is going away but I have 2 inches of mud on top of frozen solid ground. Plenty of demand for my spinach since it appears everyone else's completely failed based on the number of calls I am getting. On the up side I am excited to have some really good people hired and looking forward to spending the season with them. Value-added is saving the farm this year with greenhouse troubles we have had.

(Craftsbury) Waiting for the annual mud to dust in 4 days April event. So far we're still solidly in the mud. Sun is much appreciated and glad we won't remember starting two weeks late come November.

(Fairfield) First garlic emerging through deep straw mulch in raised garden beds. Direct seeded spinach sprouting in unheated high tunnel. First blooming Johnny Jump Ups.

(Burlington) We are hoping to get through the next week without epic flooding. The slow melt has been great so far, but with a slug of rain on the way and lots of snow in the mountains, we are eyeing the river with suspicion. If we scoot through without much water, we'll be planting out late in the week. We've been favorably impressed with our winter planted Salanova lettuces and how they are looking now. Given the winter we had, they did nicely and will make next years' list of winter crops. Cover crops are greening up and vetch survival looks good.

(Monkton) Just checked strawberries and they came through great, even the ever-bearers. The raspberries and blueberries look good too. I really thought the open winter would cause a lot of winter injury.

(Fairfax) Raking strawberries and digging parsnips. Overwintered spinach looks great. Oh the blind optimism of spring!

(Charlotte) We are getting ready to plant about 300 new blueberry and raspberry bushes, and we are busy getting the farm ready for the upcoming season.

(Westminster West) Started shipping bedding plants and herbs two weeks ago. Sales are soft compared to last year; not surprised given the weather. All plants are growing great, just running out of room due to being backed up sales wise. We finished building two new houses last week, jack hammering thru the frozen ground to get the ground pipes in. I won't be doing that again! They're done and our really busy season is starting to gather steam. Need to roll up the acre of remay from the garlic fields real soon before the deer and wind damage it. I can't tell yet how the garlic did this winter as the freeze just came out of the soil last week. Drainage ditches dug last fall seem to be helping with wet spots and it is fun watching the water rush thru the ditch! Planning for some substantial growth this year with major investments in both infrastructure and capital equipment. Farming has become a very capital intensive business with marginal ROI, but it's what I love doing and people seem to enjoy what we grow so what the heck, I'm too old to learn a new career.

(Williston) The snow has finally melted off the fields now but it is still wet. Hard to tell if there was any winter kill in my perennials yet but hoping for the best. I peeked under the mulch in the shallots and the green tops are starting. Winter cover crop is looking good and hope it does its job with all the rain coming our way. Harvested some kale and spinach out of the hoop house yesterday for a local market which they were glad to have. I planted some radish seeds a couple of weeks ago in hoop house to see if I could get a crop off before early May and they are coming along nicely. Looking forward to a dry spring this year so I can use my Rain Flo bed former earlier this year.

(Hinesburg) Hoop house greens harvest finally in full swing. Harvesting claytonia, spinach, and lettuce. Seems like a full month later than last year. Fall-planted onions (Bridger and Walla Walla) did well again under low tunnels with one layer remay and one layer plastic. Lettuce in low tunnels that did great last year was completely cleaned up by voles this year. Overwintering kale in low tunnels did not seem worthwhile again.

It starts going to seed at just about as soon as it starts growing again. Just noticed flea beetles on hoop house brassicas. I guess taking the remay off even for occasional watering is too often.

(Brookfield) We have grown Augustus potato the last two years and have decided we like the way it keeps. It is a heavy producer, a little yellow meat like Yukon Gold but larger and can be used for anything. We are digging parsnips and carrots as the ground just thawed out enough to dig. We have made about 100 gallons of syrup and feel we will make more.

(Rochester) The snow pack was not at all compacted and has melted fast in the warm weather and rain. We have plunged into pruning blueberries and are expecting less time before bud break than usual. Not in mid-season form yet but relishing getting going at last!

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) Garlic is not up yet as a bit of snow still covers the fields. I think field lettuce sowed in October and double covered with P-19 did survive in the field. We will find out soon. Tile drain that was putted down last fall simply makes miracle on wetter parts of the fields. Harvesting spinach from last fall that did survive tough winter in greenhouse. Clients very happy eating greens in never ending winter. Seems like physiological disorder in the spinach as the leaves are very savoyed, curling backward, two different tone of green; 50% loss in fall seeded green onions in greenhouse. Beets, carrots, spinach, lettuce all growing now. Used insulated 2-inch thick tarp for minus 10C in two nights.

(Little Compton RI) In years when fuel costs are high and it is difficult to justify opening greenhouses too early, we have found it worthwhile to invest in ground heat for our greenhouse tomatoes. This year we planted on March 21, two weeks later than we had planned and after two and half weeks the grafted tomato plants are just on fire! Yes, I am giving them \$300 of propane but it would have cost me a lot more than that to have been heating that 30 x 96 since March 5. We invested in the ground heat 24 years ago. We got John Bartok's guide sheet on how to do the reverse return etc. and for heat tubes we went on the cheap and just used off the shelf 3/4" black poly tubing. I think we put \$650 into the whole deal and it is still paying us back. One big secret: Take the time to pull the propane hot water heater out of your GH each summer and store it somewhere dry. If you do it will last 25 years; but if you leave it in the humid greenhouse environment you will be spending \$575 every four years for a new one! Winter markets are in the doldrums so we are packing it in to concentrate on getting ready for summer. Kreher's 4-3-10 is our new favorite fertilizer. Suddenly woke up to the fact there are a lot of veggies we grow that need that extra delivery of potassium.

UMASS EXTENSION VEGETABLE AND BERRY NEWSLETTERS

There are many excellent Extension newsletters that provide timely pest management and cultural practice information. Here are just two that I recommend you consider subscribing to; they are full of useful information and since Massachusetts is just to our south and a bit warmer, their reports often provide advance warning about emerging pests.

UMass Vegetable Notes: <http://extension.umass.edu/vegetable/subscribe-vegetable-notes>.

UMass Berry Notes: <http://extension.umass.edu/fruitadvisor/publications/berry-notes>

DECIDING WHEN TO REMOVE STRAWBERRY MULCH

(adapted from Bob Tritten, Michigan State University, via NY Berry Notes)

With our unusually late spring this year, it is hard to determine the best timing of straw removal. Look for the beginning of leaf growth under the mulch; inspect fields several times a week during the annual spring 'green up' period. Randomly pick a half dozen spots in your earliest variety and earliest site and gently pull the straw off of a section of row a few feet long. If you see new leaves (they may be a yellow color) that are beginning to emerge from the crown of the plant, the strawberries are ready to begin growth for the season and the straw needs to be removed soon. You can then recover these short sections of row. Concentrating on the earlier fruiting strawberries will help to pinpoint timing of straw removal. Move into the later varieties in the patch to do this sampling. Avoid looking only at the ends of rows; these berries are always earlier than the rest of the planting.

The condition of your soil also is a factor in determining when to remove the straw mulch. If you are on heavy soil and your soil has not dried yet, either wait for a cold morning when there is a crust on the soil surface to reduce soil compaction or simply wait a few days for your soil to dry out more. Lastly, before you remove straw, check the weather forecast. If cold weather is predicted, you should consider delaying a few days.

The earlier you remove the straw mulch, the earlier fruit will mature, which may necessitate more frost protection. For early springs like 2012, growers may delay straw removal in order to delay flowering, and harvest. Then again, in late springs like we are experiencing this season, there is a danger of leaving straw on too long. A study conducted years ago in New England compared straw removal over a six week period. The highest yields came from plants that were uncovered earliest in spring; the later the straw was removed, the more yield was reduced.

I suggest that a light layer of straw, about an inch thick, be left on the plants. Leaves and flowers can grow up through this thin layer and it may help reduce disease problems later in the season and will also help prevent some weed seeds from germinating if bare soil is exposed to sunlight. Lastly, mulch removal just prior to a rain event helps the plants respond well and keeps the mulch in place.

LAST CALL - CROP INSURANCE SURVEY

Please complete this survey aimed at improving crop insurance programs for growers. The survey takes 5 minutes and you can enter for a raffle prize of a \$50 VISA gift card. Questions? Jen Miller at jmille30@uvm.edu. The link is: <https://survey.uvm.edu/index.php/257185/lang-en>

TUNNEL BUILDING WORKSHOP

Modular Cathedral Tunnel Building for Four-Season Vegetable Production Workshop w/Clara Coleman. New Haven VT. April 26, 10am - 1pm. <http://nofavt.org/upcoming-events-calendar>