

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 22, 2008

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Craftsbury) From hip deep in mud to bordering on bone dry in about 4 days. I never cease to be surprised by how dry the spring air is, and with clear skies and a constant breeze it dries the earth in a hurry. We were lulled by the late snow and are a bit behind on starts, equipment readiness, etc. but nothing like a week of sun to get the juices going.

(Montpelier) Garlic is up, greenhouse has been harvestable since March, and the mink are still at it. Finding lots of grubs in greenhouse soil; I think they are the brown chafer beetle. So far no aphids, no sign of flea beetles yet. Starting outdoor bed prep and renovation of asparagus. Finishing touches being put on a new greenhouse and planning a lot of renovation on the others this summer. I killed two imported cabbageworm butterflies last week in the greenhouse already. I'm going to try 'Actinovate' as an antifungal this year; will see how it works on field zucchini and greenhouse tomatoes. Here's to a great growing season everyone, good luck.

(Cambridge) Tomatoes are in the tomato house and doing well. We had 50 chickens in there last October after last year's crop came out. They completely cleaned out the remaining weeds and dropped tomatoes. I'm hoping that results in fewer weeds this year and good fertility. So far the plants are displaying a really nice dark green color. Things are looking good in the bedding greenhouse too. Have been bringing an endless supply of ladybugs from the house to the greenhouse and haven't seen any signs of aphids etc. yet. Just harrowed the field so I guess that means the season has officially started.

(Salisbury NH) We are just barely starting to see our bare ground. The snow fall was so heavy this year that until April 17 we had snow covering most everywhere. Great for perennials and bush protection but not great for early growing. We received our hoop house in early March and can't set it up yet!

(Dummerston) Quite a change from last April's weather when it snowed quite a few times and killed our early retail flower and vegetable plant sales. Shoppers are out in the good weather waving their credit cards. What recession? Gas prices are high and the dollar is being stomped on by the Euro so people are staying home, planting gardens and eating local organic. We're all gonna be rich. Ground is perfect for field preparation; will this be another wet year or a dry one? Tell you in October.

(Plainfield NH) Last week's warm temps and sun finally rid us of our snow and dried up the fields nicely. The warm temps made us wish we had gotten our berry mulch off, but alas, we were tied down by greenhouse duties. By week's end the mulch had gone and we were hoping for showers after the Devrinol got put on.

Duties (goals? wish list?) this week include manuring the raspberries, finish peach pruning (buds look viable thus far) and maybe working up a little ground for spinach, carrots and beets. Some lettuce to go in and the onions could go in but the realities are that the greenhouses demand a lot of attention from all of us, both the vegetable houses and the ornamentals. We are preparing to use a lot of fencing...I heard a lot of people talking about how destructive flea beetles were last year, but for us deer loom as the biggest single problem on the horizon.

(Shaftsbury) We're pretty busy in greenhouses. It's been the year of the aphid on ornamentals; also a few spider mites and one thrips. Greenhouse tomatoes look good. It's dry in the field, but we just have a few peas in- that we had to irrigate. Perhaps more stuff tomorrow; set up irrigation pump etc. so we are ready. Deer hammered the strawberries over the winter, though leaves are appearing out of the crowns. Our over-wintered canola was also deer chow this winter.

(Grand Isle) It's been a mild winter for the overwintering crops and super early warm up! Strawberries fine; spinach fine; garlic fine; greenhouse tomatoes fine; Red Sox win World Series; What's not to like? Dried asparagus ferns are burned. Potatoes, peas, radishes, beets, and spinach are planted as of April 20. Soil underneath is cold to the touch, so we're not going to get fooled by the warm air and attempt corn or beans yet. We're gearing up for a great year. We tip our hats to the buy local theme song.

(Rochester) Blueberry pruning started late this year due to the depth of snow. We could see ground around the plants only by April 12, and even then we were standing or kneeling in up to 15 inches of snow in the alleys when we started. At the same time, the relative lack of frozen ground has caused buds to break within five days of getting started! So it is an exceptionally short pruning window this year and we will soon be taking out dead wood only. Amazingly, winter injury is minimal even though we had so much snow and layers of ice within the pack. All the blueberries look very healthy and vigorous, especially Patriots.

(W. Rutland) Greetings to all growers; personally I am glad the winter is going away, but really happy I still heat greenhouses with wood. Nothing like lowering my carbon footprint and not paying massive oil or gas bills. Planted a few more trees this week to keep my carbon credits in check. Garlic is just coming up and looks good, no heaving. I did find many fresh dug holes around the fields so the preacher is itching for some exercise. The land is still cold, but dry in areas so I will be plowing this weekend. Have you seen the increase in hooved rats this year? I bet I saw at least 500 pounds of meat one morning, eating my winter rye. Gotta put a stop to that.

(S. Londonderry) Amazing warm weather here on top of the mountain! Let's hope it returns in May. We are having a great start with the glasshouse full of bedding plants and one of the hoopouses planted to Asian cukes, bunching onions, salad mix and tomatoes.

We like to do mixed crops in each house instead of one per. I think it helps with the overall balance in them. A lot of winter repairs and organization being completed. Awaiting a delivery of both a new high tunnel and 100 chickens. Here we go again!

(Little Compton RI) Greenhouse tomatoes are all planted, a month later than in years past. We budgeted \$1500 of oil for the crop and so far are on track. After many years we decided that orienting your houses east/west is the way to go since you get much better light and early warmth during the months when the sun is still low. The only drawback is the extra heat build up during the summer months which requires a roof vent system, something even a north/south greenhouse should have. Having a large volume of extra hot air sitting above your HAF fans is actually detrimental to the crop. It not only reflects unwanted summer heat down on your crop but holds extra moist air which increases gray mold and other problems. During our last greenhouse tomato conference, the Canadian growers said this has become an important physical change they have made to most their houses..... There are other ways of achieving this without an expensive electric roof vent that goes the whole length of the house. We put in high venting windows at either end of our houses that work great in conjunction with rollup sides to get a chimney effect pulling heat out. One can also put in intermittent venting windows every thirty feet or so; these are available from Growers Supply or Johnny's.

(Wolcott) The fields are drying out quickly and we're getting ready to spread compost on them. Next we'll harrow and then pick rocks where the brassica seed crops will go. Those brassicas need to be out in the field by May 1st to get enough cold weather to make them set good amounts of seed. This year we're trying two broccoli seed crops – for the third year in a row – as we haven't gotten them enough cold in either of the past two years for them to set good seed. And then we've got another six or seven varieties for micro- and salad greens. We lost an isolation spot this year, so we're down to only two for brassicas, which is really tricky. I'm still looking hard for another one nearby enough to get our equipment there and back easily. The greenhouses were getting full of brassicas but now they've all migrated out to the cold frames, and we're starting the earliest of the cucurbit crops. The long-season winter squashes and the melons all go first, since they'll get planted out in mid-May under remay. Also on the docket are new coverings for the two hoopouses. This glorious spell of sunny weather seems like a long-belated birthday gift from the capricious powers who forgot about us all winter long...

TWILIGHT MEETING MAY 20

Focus will be on wholesale organic vegetable production and nutrient management, at Lehouillier Farm, 1 mile west of Johnson on Route 15, from 4-7pm. More details soon.

GROWING DEGREE DAYS AND PRECIP TOTALS ON-LINE

The Northeast Regional Climate Center web site provides weekly updates of GDDs as well as precipitation totals at locations across New England and NY. Go to www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry, click on 'weather'.

SWEET POTATO VARIETY TRIAL RESULTS

(contact Becky Grube at Univ. of NH, becky.grube@unh.edu, for details)

The best variety for commercial production was Beauregard, with high yields and large roots that were the color and flavor typical of supermarket sweetpotatoes. Georgia Jet had high yields and excellent flavor, but a tendency to crack that limited marketability. Vardaman had the highest flavor ratings, but produced small roots and had lower yields. Carolina Ruby was also preferred by tasters because of very intense orange flesh color and unique textured (rough) deep red skin. It had high yields, but many roots were misshapen. Other varieties that may be worth a try include white-fleshed ones such as White Yam, Henry, and Japanese.