



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –April 23, 2018

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

(Westminster) We put seeded the first planting of beets and carrots last week. The first planting of kale was transplanted last week and then got snowed on. It seems to be alright. We will be transplanting the first head lettuce next week.

(Craftsbury) The snow has reluctantly left our hillside and we have finally been able to inspect the field for winter damage. Our blueberry bushes have endured marauding turkeys, a very large deer yard, high winds, ice storms and lots of snow, again. We guess these bushes want to live as badly as we want them to. We began pruning on bare ground last weekend and have been helped by 4 students from Craftsbury Academy, who have proven to be quick studies.

In the coming week students from Hazen Union School, taking part in a week long service learning project. will volunteer some hours dragging brush from our field. Other students are volunteering on farms throughout the area. We have planned our annual Mulch Day for the first Saturday in May. This is possible because of the loyal volunteers who help out each year in exchange for a season-long price break on blueberries. This tradition dates back to the 1990's.

(Jericho) This is the second year in a row we've had a massive wind storm right after clipping up our early cucumber and tomato plants. After big losses in plants last year from the houses shaking so much they pulled plants from the ground and broke stems, we knew what was coming this year. So it was all hands on deck as the winds picked up and we unclipped all the plants. It was well worth the effort, as we only lost a few plants this year. Now they're all clipped up again and yearning for the sun, as are we all.

Great crew on board and we're keeping busy washing the last of the winter carrots and filling up the hoopouses with spring crops. Waiting, waiting for the fields to dry and warm. Snuck in some early seedings of greens in the field, but don't expect much germination at this point - always fun to try for those early plantings though - sometimes they work! Participating in a tomato nutrient study with Vern and a tomato crop profitability study with NOFA, and looking forward to learning more this season about this valuable crop at our farm.

(Benson) High Tunnel greens are still producing well with about one half of them already replaced with spring direct seedings or transplants. I've been able to incorporate more slow bolting mustards and asian greens each season and that has helped with the spring transition.

Both retail and wholesale markets have been very steady and strong throughout this winter season. Root crops sell very well even into mid-June until bunched beets and carrots become available. I've been very pleasantly surprised at just how many roots can be sold at the early outdoor markets. They sure contribute to great early season cash flow. Nothing planted outdoors yet, but maybe this coming week.

(Plainfield NH) This past weekend was a welcome relief from the grey miserable weather of the past two weeks. We busied ourselves transplanting and readying for the opening of our greenhouses. We had a brisk day Saturday with gardeners coming out after being cooped up by the weather. In the field, we have started tillage in earnest, and have been getting fertility out.

The Jamaican guest workers arrive this week, in time to help get 4 more tomato houses planted. Next is to get the potatoes and onion transplants in and some carrots, spinach, beets seeded. If that all happens in the next week we will start laying plastic and interseeding drive rows with Dutch white clover.

Pest problems are Xanthomonas showing up on a couple of geraniums, a few aphids that we are spot treating with Hippodamia ladybeetles, and PM on our first tomatoes. Last year we got hit with Anthracnose in some of the blueberries, so we are getting ready to do some detail pruning and embark on a spray program. Strawberry crowns look good after uncovering them, seemingly little winter injury. Brambles likewise are showing no winter injury at this point, but a little concerned about degree of vole damage in the summer raspberries.

(Argyle NY) This week we will have managed to get in two field seedings for April, but the carrots and beets are not up yet. Backed up with lettuce and other transplants that need to get out; will utilize these dry days to the utmost. Looking at our records we are not far off the norm for maturing plants in the high tunnels, in spite of the cool weather.

Did not see any downy mildew or powdery mildew on anything in the tunnels but have some aphids which is not normal for this time of year. Ladybugs are not working hard enough. As winter markets are coming to an end they are finishing strong with the warm sunny weather bringing folks out. Root crops are thinning out in the root cellar but have plenty to go till the new crops are in.

GET READY FOR MUMMYBERRY

adapted from an article by Mary Conklin, UConn Extension

If you've had any mummyberry at all in your blueberries in the past, start planning so it does not get ahead of you. Forsythia bloom is a good indicator of when to look for the mummy berry fungal cups that form from the mummified berries on the ground. This also lines up with the green tip bud stage of blueberries. Mummy berry is a two stage disease. The first stage is in the cool spring when the fungal spores move by wind and rain and infect new leaves and shoots.

The next phase occurs when the fungus, carried by rain, pollinators and insects, moves to the flower and infects the newly forming berries. The berries shrivel before they ripen, take on a whitish appearance, and eventually drop to the ground. The following spring, mushroom-looking fungal cups sprout out of the mummified fruit and the cycle begins again. Rutgers University considers 5 mummies per bush to indicate heavy disease pressure.

It is nearly impossible to use raking or picking up all the berries on the ground as the sole management method. If you haven't already done so, apply at least 3 to 4 inches of wood chips/mulch to cover all mummified berries that fell from last season. In future years, try to have this mulch layer down well before the plants reach the green tip stage or before forsythia begins to bloom. Cultivation between the rows will help to bury mummies that are not normally covered with mulch. Fungicides, organic and non-organic, are available to control both stages of mummy berry. The New England Small Fruit Management Guide has a detailed table showing efficacy of different materials for management of different blueberry diseases
<https://ag.umass.edu/fruit/ne-small-fruit-management-guide/highbush-blueberries/diseases>

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, growers may delay straw removal in order to delay flowering, and harvest. In late springs, there is a danger of leaving straw on too long. A study conducted years ago (by Bertie Boyce at UVM) 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.

HIGH TUNNEL SOIL TESTING REMINDER

In established tunnels with relatively high organic matter (compared to the field) it is helpful to use the Saturated Media Extract (SME) test, as well as the regular field soil test (modified Morgan's extract.) The SME test measures water-soluble, immediately available nutrients and the field soil test measures nutrients in reserve, extracted with a weak acid. Both tests measure soil pH and organic matter, but the SME test results also include soluble salts and available N which are important measures for greenhouse soils and potting mixes.

To do the SME test make sure your mix or soil has been moist and warm (room temperature) for at least a week. Send a pint (not a cup as for field soil test) to the soil test lab. The UMaine soil test lab runs both these tests for \$22, calling it the "long-term high tunnel test." See: <http://anlab.umesci.maine.edu/>

HELP GUIDE SWEDE MIDGE RESEARCH AT UVM

Swede midge, now present in several states and provinces in the U.S. and Canada, causes deformed leaves, scarred stems, and lack of head formation in broccoli, kale, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and related crops. Researchers at UVM are conducting a survey to inform their studies of new management strategies for Swede midge. They would like to know about your experience with this new pest, and about your pest management strategies. Please complete a short online survey, and you'll be entered into a drawing to win an 8" 32 GB Amazon Fire tablet! Go to: <https://survey.uvm.edu/index.php/865119?lang=en>

HELP UVM RESEARCHERS UNDERSTAND HOW REGULATIONS AFFECT YOU

A new research study at UVM farmers for two opportunities to understand farmer perspectives about government regulations on their farms. Farmers can take an online survey about government regulations on their farms by going to: <https://survey.uvm.edu/index.php/627721>. Questions? Meredith Niles, 802-656-4337 or mtniles@uvm.edu

We also seek to interview farmers about their experience complying with government regulations on their farm, especially the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPS). This involves a 1-hour recorded interview. Farmers will not be identified in the research outcomes and all information will remain anonymous. Farmers will be compensated \$50. If interested, contact Courtney Hammond Wagner at 802-560-5587 or courtney.hammond@uvm.edu

RURAL VERMONT “ROADMAP TO THE STATEHOUSE”

This event on Friday April 27 from 10-2 at the VT Statehouse will include a briefing on current issues and legislation affecting small farms and the communities they serve, as well as training in effective advocacy and assistance in meeting with your legislators. All who value Vermont’s working landscape are invited to attend. Lt. Governor David Zuckerman, who is also a vegetable farmer, will be hosting participants in his office. There will also be a “meet & greet” with lawmakers and constituents, followed by meetings with legislators over lunch, and an option tour to observe House and Senate floor debates. Rural Vermont offers stipends to help farmers cover costs associated with childcare, temporary farm labor, and transportation. Applications are at www.ruralvermont.org or call (802) 223-7222.

FARMER FEEDBACK STILL NEEDED PRODUCE SAFETY REGS

The New England Produce Safety Coalition needs small and medium-scale produce growers to participate in an interview about the impact of new produce safety regulations, including the cost of implementing best practices. Feedback from growers will help shape future produce safety informational materials to help with adaptation; you will receive a \$25 gas card as thanks for participating. To schedule a 45-minute interview (phone or in-person), please contact UVM research assistant Alisha Utter at autter@uvm.edu