



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 24, 2012

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Ferrisburg) Much needed rain arrived. Greenhouse tomatoes looking great. Should be picking new spinach, scallions, and lettuce in 2 weeks. Looking forward to setting cole crops out earlier than ever before as the ground work is all done for them.

(Rochester) Pruning is complete. New fall-bearing raspberries planted: Himbo-Tops. Bumblebees arrived; this year we bought 12 hives instead of 4 for insurance against early blooming which is what we have. Everything is early. Brambles are leafing out. Patriot blueberry flowers are opening with corollas at half-length making them vulnerable to damage at 26F, which is predicted in a few nights. We will be running that gauntlet for a few weeks but we appear to have a good berry crop if Mother Nature is kind.

(Guilford) During heat wave our well went from 500 gal/day down to 200, so we were eeking out irrigation water for transplants. This slowed planting considerably. Our hoophouse had high salts test result so we want to flush it before planting, but need water. Even with such a drought our hoophouses have decent soil moisture. Think the cover restricted evaporation during the dry winter. Going to cover some strawberries and try to get some off early before the awful invader SWD kicks in.

(Tunbridge) We were able to get on any part of our field this spring, did a lot of subsoiling. Things germinated well despite dryness. We put floating row covers on everything we seed in this time of year. It will be interesting to see how the coral peas do, they don't like warm springs. This year we doubled our planting so will probably end up with the same amount. We're planting onions in plastic to try to deal with weeds, 3 rows rather than 2 since we won't have to cultivate. When things dry out we will be weeding, probably a first for us in April. I am not complaining about that. Potatoes are in the living room on trays green sprouting.

(Craftsbury) Got a new mulch layer that makes some high beds, thinking about shifting to higher beds for better drainage but it makes it tough to keep cultivator tractor clearance. Finally installing really good overhead irrigation in greenhouses, blows my mind it took me this long as it is cheap and what a labor saver. Markets seem strong, hoping to have a heck of a year.

(Montpelier) Flea beetles are out and saw first cabbage butterfly. Hope freezing temps this week kills some early pests. Remay and plastic going down all over. I use old greenhouse plastic with #19 remay to protect early asparagus from frost as it is popping out of the ground. White plastic is down in the tomato houses and plants are in. Seedling shed is overflowing. Trying to get some early brassicas in on black plastic and get them remayed for the flea beetles. Woodchuck season has started and so far it is Farmer 2, Wood chuck 0. Game On. Waiting to see about deer pressure; too optimistic given the mild winter. The last farmers' market was impressive, most vendors nearly sold out by noon. CSA shares trickling in, 30% ahead of last year. Trying to double membership this year. Pricing is difficult given fuel and packaging costs. Value added product market continues to be strong.

(Royalton) I've never seen the ramps (wild leeks) up this early. Already selling them at farmers' market. Overwintered spinach is ready to bolt because of the heat. Dill, carrots, bok choy doing well in hoophouse. Planted peas outside, almost planted corn, but then realized: it's April. Rhubarb will be ready soon. Planting highbush blueberries after inspirational presentations at conferences; thinking about hoophouse figs. Hayfields and pasture are three inches high. Vernal pools dried up and the woodfrog eggs have succumbed. Another wierd weather pattern.

(Westfield) Most work is still in the greenhouse with the bedding plants and the greens, I manage to do some seeding outside and prepare my fields so after this rain it is going to be full speed. Greenhouse tomatoes looks good, should start harvest early June, I have to replant half my cucumbers on the edges of the greenhouse; in the days after planting them the heat and wind beat them to death. I took down the "skirt" to put up a new one but not fast enough. CSA filling slowly but restaurants and stores are eager to get fresh produce.

(Westminster) It has been very dry and windy until we got 2.5 inches of rain. You can watch the strawberries and garlic grow. Harvesting and selling all the spinach, arugula and asparagus I can get to the markets. The greens are out of unheated hoop houses. The heat of March pushed the asparagus up then used row cover when normal cold temps returned; the cover made it warmer and it grew more, so I have had it 2 to 3 weeks earlier than average.

(Surry NH) This has me scratching my head: Strawberries on plastic, raised beds, plants nice and green but the buds seem way ahead. A few warm days would bring on bloom. Bud stems are very short--right down on the plastic. Cavendish seems to be the most affected.

(Benson) I did not mind the dusty dryness of the last few weeks. Lots of planting done, set up both irrigation systems with pumps, pipelines, sprinklers. Flushed out the voles, mice and nests. Cleared brush, straightened out pipelines to reduce leaks and kept pumping water. Now we're back to seasonal tasks. It's challenging to transition from the late overwintered crop bounty to the earliest spring crops. We pull buds from the brassicas to delay the jump into reproductive mode, trying to keep overwintered spinach not too warm and not too cold so it doesn't frost burn or bolt, and plant like crazy so we can be ready for our first summer markets.

(Warren) Got ahead on a lot of field work and high tunnels all seeded and looking good. Strawberries under movable tunnel are flowering. We love not having to sweat the moisture and temps. Spinach seeded mid-March before the tunnel was moved looks great, harvesting this week. Tomatoes way too far ahead. A breakthrough with onion transplants is soaking them in fish emulsion every time we trim the tops. We grow in 288s due to lack of space and they have always fallen apart. Spraying with fish emulsion just led to mold. Winter squash and cucumbers and will be set up to fertilize through the drip. Hope this will give us more control over fertility if it's a wet year and better yields if it's a dry one.

(Shelburne) Prepping beds. Best overwintered spinach yields I have ever seen, from Space and Winter Bloomsdale. Space was definitely the winner; very high yielding and still going. Building a 32x144 tunnel to bring two online for next winter.

(Norwich) Got whole bunch of beds ready for stale bed flaming and now with the rain, weeds will grow. Top-dressed six acres of non-organic rye with urea during the rain. Picking overwintered spinach, sure tastes better than greenhouse mush. Spring-seeded spinach sizing up even without covers. Plastic berries at 10% bloom, could be trouble ahead. Peas up; first brassicas out and doing great; half acre of green-sprouted spuds in the ground and covered; killing lots of woodchucks before they get ideas; trying four acres of field peas and oats. Also trying scratching field peas into standing rye. Greenhouses open early for bedding plant sales. Lots of returning and new CSA members keeping cash flow up. Really good crew this year, all grownups and serious. We're optimistic.

(Plainfield NH) Some premature blossom weirdness in the plasticulture strawberries; some bloomed as soon as the snow melted. Thankfully bare ground plants look fine, no popcorn stage yet. Peaches and blues beginning to bloom, keeping my fingers crossed. Some carrots, scallions and beets seeded in the field. Retail greenhouses commanding much of the labor. For those with smartphones, a couple of useful free aps: from Farm Progress an ap for monitoring degree days (so we can utilize Hank Bissell's clever corn planting scheduling and maybe insect emergence). Biobest offers a beneficial insect chemical sensitivity site that is useful but needs more development. NRCS Soil Web ap uses GPS and identifies the soil where you stand and provides much more info than the old aerial maps.

(Hinesburg) Irrigated for the first time ever in April a week ago. Normally have barely set any seeds out by that time, but I jumped the gun with peas, spinach, carrots and beets, they were up and needing water. Now weather looks more normal so it will feel like we are right on schedule instead of already behind. Onions transplanted soon and maybe some potatoes.

(W. Brookfield) Amazing to have a full field of mesclun, beets and peas outdoors in mid-April. What a way to jump start pests too. We've got remay ready. Winter spinach is being moved out as spring spinach is almost ready. Off to a good start.

(Pownal) My greenhouse tomatoes look great!

(Salisbury NH) Amazingly the peas and beets came up even without irrigation, before the rain. Radishes in hoophouse recovered from cold spell, after the hot spell. Scallions overwintered in hoophouse are bolting. Overwintered lettuce got bitter from heat. Tried hullless oats and 6-row barley from Johnny's this year. Broadcast seeds rather than rows as we just wanting to see how it grows and will use for animal feed/bedding. Have a weed issue from getting manure and compost off the farm. Blueberry plants loaded with blossoms; native bumblebees are active. Hope SWD doesn't show up. Regular customers coming but haven't hung open sign because most people don't understand 'early veggies'. Went to roundtable discussion with USDA Deputy UnderSecretary of Marketing last week. Growers concerned about the integrity of the word Organic and about regulations and paperwork that keep farmers from farming.

(Enfield NH) Planted 1.5 acres with greens. Almost ready to put onions in but rain kept us from getting in the field, plus wanted the beds wetter before laying plastic. We are 2 to 3 weeks ahead of normal. Greenhouse greens are done, all came in early. Planting greenhouse tomatoes this week.