



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 25, 2016
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Waterbury) Garlic is looking good despite the lack of snow and erratic temperatures this winter. We typically use black plastic mulch or straw on our garlic beds. This year we are experimenting with 2 rows with silver plastic mulch. We feel that perhaps it gets too hot under the black plastic in July and causes early maturation. So far, the garlic in the silver plastic rows is smaller, which we would expect from lack of heat from the black plastic, but it is also not looking as healthy, some yellowing and not as green and vibrant as the garlic under the black plastic. It will be interesting to see how it compares at the end of the season.

(South Strafford) Morrill Mountain Fruit Farm. Berry bushes seem to have weathered the fluctuating temps without the benefit of snow insulation. Currant bushes and raspberries leafing out. Blueberry buds swelling. In April the Berry Patch is looking full of promise.

(Rochester) Despite a 4° F. night two weeks ago when our Patriot blueberries had buds at full swell they seem to have suffered no damage. The literature varies about when damage at bud swell will occur, but below 10° F. was supposed to spell doom. I can only think that the earliness of the date and the dry conditions must have meant there was little or no moisture in the buds despite their swollen state.

(Williston) Still harvesting spinach and kale in hoophouse with steady sales to wholesale markets getting \$7-8/lb. I have been able to water in the hoophouse for the last couple of weeks with the mild weather. Rabbits are my biggest problem and voles have disappeared for now. Just got my hoophouse soil sample results back from UMaine so I will amend soil and let it incubate for two weeks before planting. All field perennials are starting to show signs of growth (tarragon, lemon balm, anise hyssop, chives, winter savory, lovage) and the garlic is up with great survival rate. I planted in black plastic and covered with straw and had no problems with winter kill especially with the mild winter. Cover crop is starting to grow back after the deer had nipped it back this past fall/winter. Looking back at last year's notes the weather was very much like a roller coaster with 80 degree temps in early May and frost on May 26. I will keep that in the back of my mind while planting in the field this year. I think climate change is here to stay.

(Benson) Wow, is it dry, and getting drier by the hour. I decided to set up both overhead irrigation systems before dropping in the first transplant. Had to move pipelines a couple of times already to direct the wind-blown water to the right spot. I'm not really complaining; this beats a wet spring any day. All in all a good start. First plantings of carrots and beets are in along with the full array of radishes, turnips, etc. We'll just keep on seeding and planting and hope for a good productive season.

(Plainfield) Seedlings growing well, enjoying all the sunshine and good potting mix. Nice crop of spinach in our tomato houses. Time to get some ground ready for early transplants. Kale and chard plugs need to get in soon. Time to rake the mulch off of the strawberries. What does May hold? Might be frosty if it stays this dry.

(Westminster West) Our heavy upland farm soils have finally dried out last week so plowing, discing and general field work is under way. Installed a new main water line to run the irrigation from with larger diameter and more capacity. Preparing a field that hasn't been plowed in forty years leads to exciting discoveries of large rocks to add to our collection of glacial debris. Early plant sales a bit slow due to weather but with the worst now over sales are picking up, especially with our more southern accounts in CT and MA. This is the most challenging year in terms of labor we've ever had, with two unexpected departures last week. It's getting harder to fill positions with reliable, steady staff. We have raised pay and provided unemployment compensation and are still having issues with people not wanting to work full time. After years of buying new trucks to fill our growing needs, I finally decided to lease a much larger truck (26') for the busy plant shipping season instead of buying and I'm delighted as to how easy and affordable it is! No longer will I tie up capital in a vehicle that I use seasonally. All the regular maintenance is already done, and every year, it's a brand new truck! Sweet. The longer I farm and stay in business, the more I learn.

(Plainfield NH) Cool and very dry. Trying to minimize tillage to maximize soil moisture. Other than 4-5 acres of peas and oats, nothing out in the ground. Fertilizing blueberries and strawberries. Field crew (Mike and Ray) spent a lot of time flat filling, and readying the retail area of the ornamental greenhouses for opening. Shifting to the fields and setting up pumps. College and H2A workers not here yet, but if we get some moisture soon we can lay some plastic and be ready for them when they get here in 10 days or so.

(Argyle NY) Pleasant Valley Farm. The cold weather did kill off some of the strawberry flowers, but blueberries and other fruits seem OK. We have a full seeding into all our fields, did a light disking on a clay-loam field, and had to get all the irrigation systems up and going! The kale in has produced amazingly well all winter, both in the high tunnels and a temporary 30' tunnel that we threw up in November over the fall kale. We grew 8 varieties of kale and a few still have not bolted: Red Ursa, White Russian, and Siberian.

Spinach is going by in the tunnels and we will be putting in the cucumbers, squash, basil and soon the tomatoes. Transplants of lettuce have been going out in the fields for 2 weeks; garlic is up 5 inches and we are starting to harvest the overwintered spinach. Overwintered, October-planted, onions inside the 14x100 small tunnel are about twice the size as those planted next to the tunnel with just 2 layers of row cover on them. It will be good for staggered production though, and we will have a report on the trial varieties of reds and yellows later, as well as harvest dates and yields. Markets move back to the outside pavilions in 2 weeks, and our production has been keeping up with the increased sales.

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) Everything grows well in the greenhouse. No major issues with pest or diseases. Could not get a third cut on my arugula. I still have to work on my climate control and irrigation. Anybody make money with radishes in greenhouse? Would be interested in knowing how. They are useful to fill a 3-4 weeks gap. Pretty dry spring so far. Lots of light but night still cold. I tried to spread manure and lime on dryer fields with success as compaction was manageable after the passage. I am a bit behind on machinery preparation.

(Little Compton RI) It has been another spring for the record books. I have never had to get all our irrigation pumps and delivery pipes going just to get peas and spinach up and growing. The clear days and relentless winds have sucked all the moisture off the surface of the soil. Even our garlic is looking beat by the drying winds. We reluctantly put in a last-minute series of winter greens crops in our high tunnels and making good money from restaurant and coop sales. Boy, the high tunnels really are a better growing environment than just a single hooped low tunnel for rapid growth this time of year with increasing light. I don't know how or why but we have no thrips, white fly or aphids to speak of. Still we are buying in sachets for our first GH cukes to control spider mites and thrips. Starting our celeriac and leeks in 265 trays and bumping them up saved us tons of room a few months ago and has worked great for timing and space utilization now. Markets getting into the doldrums. By mid-May the indoor winter markets will be ghost towns as folks put their focus on their gardens, etc.

DON'T LET GREENHOUSE/TUNNEL APHIDS GET AHEAD OF YOU

About 30 different species of aphids can be found in greenhouses, depending on the crop. Many species are found on only one, or at most, a few host plants. Aphid species commonly found in greenhouses and tunnels include: green peach aphid, melon/cotton aphid, foxglove aphid, and root aphid. Both predators and parasitoids can be used as biological control agents for aphids in greenhouses. Aphid predators include ladybird beetles, lacewings, and predatory midges. Aphid parasitoids include *Aphidius colmani* for green peach aphid, and *Aphidius ervi* or *Aphelinus abdominalis* for foxglove or potato aphid. Some biological control suppliers sell mixtures of parasitoid species, which may be useful if several aphid species are present.

In general, parasitoids are more effective than predators in reducing aphid populations, although parasitoids may fail to provide acceptable control under warm conditions or at times when aphid populations tend to increase rapidly. Banker plants may be useful in controlling aphids and reducing the costs of applying pest controls. Early detection and accurate identification are key to managing aphids in greenhouses. For detailed information on aphid species, and aphid natural enemies, banker plants and more, see: <https://ag.umass.edu/fact-sheets/aphids-on-greenhouse-crops>

SCOUT YOUR BLUEBERRIES FOR MUMMYBERRY DISEASE

This is the time of year to get ahead of mummyberry disease, which can sneak up on you if you don't pay attention. 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 is also the green tip bud stage of blueberries. As with most diseases, mummyberry management is much easier if detected early, before it becomes widespread in a planting. Mummyberries look like little black pumpkins; they may still be hanging on the plant or may be partially embedded in the soil or under leaf litter. When they germinate they develop spore-producing fungal cups (apothecia) which look like small brown trumpets coming out of the mulch or soil. It is advisable to scout for these where you had a lot of mummyberry and in wet areas and areas close to the woods. If you had mummyberry last year, then you should plan to spray for this disease as buds break. Physically disrupting the soil will also help, as will a dormant spray of lime sulfur. Ground sprays of urea have been shown to burn the developing fungal cups. For more information on scouting for and managing this disease:

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/scouting_and_management_of_mummy_berry_in_blueberries

ON-FARM IRRIGATION WORKSHOP MAY 18

Come to River Berry Farm in Fairfax VT from 3-6 pm on May 18 to learn about how to install or improve drip irrigation systems. Efficient systems are becoming increasingly important given weather extremes and food safety concerns. Trevor Hardy of Brookdale Fruit Farm (and Farm Irrigation Supplies) in Hollis, NH, will walk us through the basics of irrigation in the field and greenhouses. Specific topics will include: Design, layout, and component selection; Determining water requirements and irrigation scheduling; Operation and maintenance of your system; Fertigation for efficient nutrient applications. For more info Joshua.Faulkner@uvm.edu or 802-656-3495. Individuals requesting a disability-related accommodation to participate in this program should contact Cheryl Herrick at 802-656-5459 by April 28. The workshop is free; to register go to: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/on-farm-irrigation-workshop-tickets-24426819274>