



## Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 5, 2011

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, [vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu](mailto:vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu)

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry>

### REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(E. Montpelier) Finally getting some warmer (more normal) temps and plenty of rain to get the snow out of here. March was a tough month that is going to cost me dearly. The lower than normal temps (15-20 degrees cooler) but plenty of sunshine caused a great deal of issues in my unheated greenhouses. Overwintered spinach and salad greens became way too stressed and are bolting about 3-4 weeks earlier than normal, the aphids have also shown up earlier than expected. I went ahead and bought green lace wing larva and put down a quick application of Pyganic so we will see how it goes. Having to tear out a lot of beds and put new plugs in like crazy to keep production going. Managing to keep up, the new stuff will be harvestable by this weekend. Demand remains strong at the market and wholesale accounts are desperate for greens after a long cold winter that just does not want to let go. New seedling greenhouse is sitting in the door yard waiting to be set up. Still have to do a bit of planning but this is going to be a big boost to my operation as well as a bit of a luxury compared to the last 8 years of seed starting.

(Hoosick Falls NY) Onions starts are about to get a good trimming; greens are plentiful in the hoop house thanks to some help from Safer soap. We worked up our first early field patch with the cattle and seeded early root and greens with the tractor, tucked it in with two layers of row cover in preparation for the 12 inches of snow that never happened; they are on a nicely drained south slope and should do well. Pea patch is ready to seed as soon as it dries after this rain.

(Little Compton RI) Plastic covered early potatoes: we are set with plastic down and potatoes sprouting or 'chittin.' We are being much more careful not to wake them up too. Increasing heat and light gradually and not cutting till 48 hours before planting. We will plant them in 9 inches high raised beds. And will use a double wheel water wheel transplanter; the spikes set at 9 inches in the row with 20 inches between rows. When my crew puts them in the punched hole with a good amount of water (with Actinovate and seaweed starter) they are instructed to push through to the bottom of that soupy muddy hole till the seed piece bottoms out. Now it is down 6 to 7 inches under the plastic. We will then cover the plastic rows of land with some row cover. They come up real fast and can give us a crop of Norlands by the Four of July. We only do about 500 lbs this way and the rest of our potatoes go in the more traditional method. These early potatoes really impress our CSA and farmers market patrons; well worth the cost of production. Oh, and did I forget to say: no weeds! When they are ready we mow them off on a bright sunny morning and if they are close to flowering they will pretty much go down and start hardening right up. Now they hang under the plastic and await our arrival to pull a bushel or two just before a market.

(Richmond) The fields are rapidly drying out and the rye is coming back nicely. We have started tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, onions, etc. in the greenhouse and spinach and lettuce mix is coming in nicely in the high tunnel. We have carrots, spinach and beets coming back nicely from a winter in the high tunnel.

(Fair Haven) Fields are finally clear of all snow; all the orchard trees pruned; working on raspberries and blueberries. Bought more fall raspberries. We planted about 1000 spring flower bulbs last fall. They are breaking ground and we hope to have some cut flowers from them for market sales by the last few Winter Markets or by the first Summer Market on May 7. We have got our Irish Spring Original Bar soap ready to put into the fruit field this weekend. It really keeps the deer from nibbling our tender plants. We buy several 8 or 12 packs where they are on sale and get out the drill and make them into soap-on-a-rope. Then we hang them in every tree and on stakes in between the smaller plants. We are hoping for a good gradual warm-up this spring to prevent some of the injury to our plants and to have no late frosts like last year that killed off most of our fruit flowers.

(Argyle NY) Our high tunnels have been in transition over the last few weeks with new seedings from the greenhouse of salad mix, Asian Greens, broccoli raab, and Happy Rich broccoli being transplanted in after ripping out the older Asian greens, arugula, etc. Production has increased on everything and we have surplus to sell to restaurants after dealing with 2 very busy farmers' markets every week. The spinach was diagnosed with a couple of mites (microscopic) with the damage showing as ragged edges around the leaves due to the chewing of the newly formed leaves down in the crowns. After much research, we used Aza-Direct twice as a spray and there doesn't appear to me any new damage. We've also learned that the bad mites do nicely in the winters because the good predatory mites are not active, so the balance is thrown off. We will be doing some predatory mite releases in late summer to get mites under control before going into the next winter season (Carol Glenister at IPM Labs in NY was very helpful in all this and they will supply the mites to us). Always something new to deal with! We put up a 14 x 100' low tunnel which is now full of over 12 varieties of transplanted spinach for some trials. I'll post the winter spinach trial results for yield next time. We dug parsnips this past week, are digging the overwintered leeks (Tadorna) that look great, and the overwintered onions (3 types) in the mini-tunnels (3' high) are looking great after being buried in what looked like igloos most of the winter! We tilled and planted radishes and arugula in the field yesterday, and are planting peas in the greenhouse tomorrow which will be transplanted out on Biotello in 2 weeks. We transplanted the peas last year and it worked great! Still lots to do....trim orchard, prune blueberries, split wood, etc. but nice to have warmer weather for a change.

(Grand Isle) We went to St Remi, Quebec this week to get some agricultural supplies and happily found the border crossing effortless this year. There is a wealth of farms across our northern border and it is a shame there is not more ease in sharing expertise and experiences. We have learned interesting things from the Canadian speakers we have heard in the past at the Vermont Vegetable Grower's convention and the New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference. On the farm, we are way behind last year. In 2010 by April 3 we had planted seed potatoes, peas, spinach, beets and the like. This year the soil is too wet and cold and we have done no field planting yet.

(Salisbury NH) Radishes, Swiss chard, turnip, pac choi, argula, spinach and lettuces all up and growing well. Heavier watering definitely needed now. We pulled up some spinach that made it through the winter because it had some kind of mildew and we didn't want it to spread. Found 2 very plump caterpillars--think they're army worms--once we pulled up the spinach. Picked All Star lettuce mix and Spicy Mesclun mix which is already starting to bolt due to high temps in the hoophouse since we don't have any automatic opener and some days we have leave for work with the door partly opened. Peas planted early February were spotty in germinating so we replanted. Transplanted bunching onions into raised beds in the hoophouse. We still have about 8 inches of snow but started to prune blueberries. Carrots planted in September are showing signs of growth. Is it worth it to spend all the time trying to keep things through the winter? We're thinking just finish up in early December and then start again in February.

(Middle Granville NY) Fields are starting to dry out; chiseled/rototilled before the rain/snow Friday and got radishes, spinach, and kale in. Cleaning up old rowcover and bags from other fields, hoping to get in and trim some hedgerows next week. Greenhouses exploding; tomatoes going in Friday. Hopefully can get first field transplanting of beets in next week, as well as Swiss chard and head lettuce. Ginger arrived couple of days ago; we'll put that in the prop-house to germ this coming week. Overwintered onions survived under Johnny's mini-tunnels; now if I could just keep the voles out of them.

(Plainfield NH) Various weather systems continue to dump moisture (mostly white junk) on us; fields are wet and snow covered still. Propane usage for the past winter continues at record levels. Greenhouses are on schedule and stuff looks good. Some blueberry pruning accomplished. Strawberry plants have had an easy winter; crowns in very good shape. When the weather finally does break, everyone is going to be very busy trying to get ahead of the curve.

### **WHEN SHOULD STRAW MULCH BE REMOVED FROM STRAWBERRIES?**

Research has shown that straw should be removed soon after snow melts and the danger of severe cold temperatures is past. Usually this is late March in New York State. The additional light that the plants receive in early spring is extremely beneficial for growth and productivity. Growers concerned about cold temperatures can use a rowcover to protect plants after the straw mulch is removed. In Vermont, research (by Dr. Bertie Boyce, former UVM fruit specialist) removed straw in mid-March, mid-April and mid-May in each of 3 years. In each year, yields were highest with the earliest straw removal date. Similar results were obtained in New York. (Marvin Pritts, Cornell University)

### **USE THE RIGHT TEST FOR YOUR GREENHOUSE SOILS**

Remember to test your potting soil and/or compost-amended greenhouse soils. Do not use a standard field soil test; use the Saturated Media Extract test, also called Greenhouse Media test. This test includes soluble salts, available nitrate and ammonium, as well as pH and water-extractable nutrient levels. It is relatively inexpensive compared to the cost of any reduction in crop growth.

Make sure your mix or soil has been moist and warm (room temperature) for at least a week before testing. Send at least one pint to the soil test lab; UMaine (207) 581-3591 <http://anlab.umesci.maine.edu/> or UMass (413) 545-2311 [www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest](http://www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest). The cost is \$22 at UMaine and now includes organic matter; at UMass it is \$15 and you should ask for the organic matter test, too, and add \$5. Put my e-mail at the bottom of the submission form if you want me to get a copy of the results so I can provide recommendations.

### **HIGH TUNNEL BERRY WORKSHOP APRIL 26**

This workshop will take place from 8:30-4 at the Radisson Hotel Center of NH, 700 Elm Street, Manchester NH. It will provide growers with up-to-date information on producing berry crops in high tunnels, and will provide research and extension personnel with information on grower's needs. Cost: \$30 per person includes lunch. Questions? Suzanne Hebert at 603-862-3200 or [suzanne.hebert@unh.edu](mailto:suzanne.hebert@unh.edu). Registration Deadline: April 19. Online registration is strongly encouraged: [https://www.events.unh.edu/RegistrationForm.pm?event\\_id=8398](https://www.events.unh.edu/RegistrationForm.pm?event_id=8398).