



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 24, 2011

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Warren) Just finished planting our high tunnels, they were moved late because we were waiting on compost. As a result a lot of the transplants did not look so hot. We missed the flame weeding on our first half acre of carrots and beets. Especially frustrating since we built a tractor mounted flame weeder over the winter that we are really proud of. Got the parsnips and parsley root flamed though. Hothouse tomatoes showing just a hint of red and the cucumbers are about 2 weeks away. Onions have finally taken off and the spuds are in. Farm store and wholesale sales are really good, can't wait to be selling something other than greens.

(Westminster West) Having just missed a hail storm and 4 inches of rain nearby I have reason to feel optimistic. Sales are tepid but actually steady so when the sun starts shining I'm sure things will pick up. A bit of Botrytis on a few items in the greenhouses but not too bad considering the lack of sun. Will start applying Oxidate today. Tunnel tomatoes are looking great with flowers starting to appear. Onions all in and looking good from all this rain; need to start cultivating when it's dry enough. Did manage to cultivate the garlic field before the latest round of rain. There's been water coming out of the drainage pipes almost non-stop since the snow melted, glad we installed those last year or our tunnels would be mud city inside. Planted 2500 squash plugs and they're coming up and when the weather and ground is prepared we should be good to set those out and keep pace with the season. Cover crop of hairy vetch is doing a great job soaking up the water and protecting the soil, almost not looking forward to plowing that great looking crop in! This will be my 40th year of farming in Vermont so starting to plan some sort of party....good luck to all and stay dry.

(Montpelier) Light sandy soils continue to drain well but they are still overwhelmed by the sheer volume of moisture. Attempts at planting continue. Raised beds, row cover and mulch are very much in use here. Deer are being fairly bold but not coming in the fence yet. No woodchucks to report. TPB and the first of the cucumber beetles have shown themselves. Flea beetles are a bother as well. I'm resorting to transplanting 200-cell mesclun and spinach to get an outside stand going. Direct seeding is finally starting to take as well. Another greenhouse is on order for this year. Farmer's market is very solid so far this season. Wholesale account demand continues to outstrip supply. New CSA model is sold out with a waiting list started for next season. Winter CSA interest appears to be solid. Nutrient leaching continues to be a problem with all the rain but I am staying after it. A friend is giving me some rice transplants this week and I am putting them in. See how it goes.

(Rochester) Persistent rain has interrupted our spring schedule, but we are fortunate to have well-drained soil and no risk of flooding. We have left 150 blueberries unpruned this year--about 5% of the patch--but got all the raspberries done. Bumblebees were delivered but they have had to make do with dandelions as the blueberries are late to flower this year.

Something has killed off the blackberry floricanes, seemingly the frost we had on the morning of May 7. It is time they come out to make space for something else. Sure could use some dry weather.

(Plainfield NH) The best thing about this weather is we haven't had to irrigate for frost. Most of our first plantings are all out and looking fine, mainly because of sandy soils. No major pests except TPB showing up in early strawberries blossoms, seen them active in the fields while temps were in the high 50's, which is pretty cool for them. Working extremely hard culturally trying to keep Botrytis and fungus gnats in check in the ornamental and tomato greenhouses. Sales are pretty strong despite the grim weather. I don't know how much actual rain we have gotten in the last ten days but my wife asked if I would go out and mow the mushrooms...

(Sudbury) Rain, rain go away and come another month! After the long winter Spring has been no gift to us. In the past we've had good drainage and no problems but our carrots have already been under water three times - but still germinating. In spite of the damp the garlic looks great, the asparagus tastes great and the strawberries have many flowers covered with honeybees. We have been able to get peas, beets, spinach, lettuce, radishes, early onions and arugula in the ground but the rest of our beds are so wet we can't even walk around them right now. I think any tilling with the tractor would find us up to our hubs quickly. Our little greenhouse is crammed with plants and our zucchini may have downy mildew before they get in to the ground! BTW, do you know anyone at UVM familiar with fish farming - this could be the year to switch? This too shall pass but it has definitely been frustrating the last few weeks.

(Shaftsbury) Considering purchase of amphibious tractor if this weather is an indication of our climate changed future. We have some crops in the ground, most growing slowly and looking a bit light in color. This year's strawberry crop, though a bit of a weak stand, has nice set of large blossoms forming. Next year's strawberry crowns set in with waterwheel, and they are the best stand we've ever had. Garlic looks good. Transplanted onions a few weeks ago and the Candy and Spanish had an infestation of maggots, but the storage types we planted in another field a week or so later are about 100% successful. Wondering if it is location, variety (sweets vs. storage) or timing that kept the maggots away from later planted crop. Also having read in some Canadian extension note, we now plant our storage onions far from our sweets, as the sweets get diseased/thrips first and then it spreads to storage when they are to close. Bedding plant sales are as strong as last year. Great crew keeping it lively!

(Woodbury) Feeling like we are only a week behind in terms of plants in the ground; not much is moving once it goes out though. Some fields drain better than others, and rotations and plans are best left fluid. Greenhouses are keeping us very busy, so we aren't idle from the weather, the problem will be the saddle between plant sales and field crops at the market. Plant sales have been great, and are also one of our most enjoyable parts of the season. Have a greenhouse to put up in a week or so, started building a house too. Planning on lots of free time this summer.

(Little Compton RI) These are the seasons where management of the details is everything. We discovered that an employee had put some rotten potatoes into our compost pile! They were growing like mad but a disaster waiting to happen. Into a plastic bag and to the dump asap. We keep our greenhouse tomatoes on the lean side till about the fifth cluster; so we don't have them too green and succulent during these cool rainy periods.

Starting June 1st we side dress them with fish meal and compost to give them the last push into the summer fruiting season. Even so, we are pruning twice a week trying to stay ahead of early blight, Botrytis and other funk. Houses where we had turned the heat off for the season are now back on and keeping an average temp above 65 degrees. Heating the greenhouses to this temperature is not much money this time of year; we are heating and power venting two hours after sundown to get the excess moisture out of the house for the overnight time period (an old Geranium grower taught me this trick). You can definitely see and feel the difference the next morning. Potatoes are our biggest worry. Eighty percent are in but no chance of first time weeding or "dragoff" possible for the next week unless things turn around. Time to get the old flamer out of the shed.

(Wolcott) Everything is pretty soggy here, but the farm crew chugs on. They're laying all those acres of plastic in between the rain showers. The salad green seed crops are all in the ground now, except the deer ate all of the broccoli and most of the komatsuna in the first week they were out. The rest of them are pretty happy so far, loving the cool, wet weather, as are the weeds.

(Salisbury NH) Not much irrigation needed so far this year! Spinach, lettuce, radishes look great. Carrots germinated nicely with all this rain. Definite difference in vigor in the garlic we saved and planted versus the purchased cloves; ours is noticeably weaker. Blueberries were pruned heavily but look pretty good. Local bumblebees are out in force whenever there's a break in the downpours. Kakurei turnips were mostly good but had some root maggot damage. Pepper and eggplants we started in March are looking awful as the hoop house temps were hovering around 50 degrees with overcast days. Hope to try a "caterpillar" this year over the field tomatoes.

TRANSPLANT TIPS FOR POOR WEATHER

(adapted from U. Delaware Extension)

Warm season vegetable transplants vary in their ability to withstand stress and sub-optimal conditions. Tomatoes, cucumbers, and squash are better able to handle early season stresses than cantaloupes, watermelons, or peppers. When temperatures are cool and soils are wet, growth is minimal in these crops and when sunny weather returns plants may wilt at first because root systems have not established or are not functioning well. Seed corn maggots and root diseases such as Pythium can further stress transplants and reduce stands. To minimize these problems: make sure transplants easily pull from trays and have full root balls; do not rush transplants into the field; harden off well by exposing them to outside conditions, eliminating fertilizer, and reducing watering; do not use leggy transplants if possible as they are more susceptible to handling and wind; take extra care to set transplants at proper depth to cover the root ball but not the stem. If plants will hold, wait for more favorable weather since often there is no earliness gained by planting in the stressful period.

ORGANIC GROWERS PESTICIDE LIST

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets has developed a spread sheet showing many of the pesticides commonly used by organic farmers that are registered in Vermont. It is posted at: http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/Pubs/OrganicPesticidesVT_5-13-11.pdf

CULTURAL PRACTICES FOR DISEASE PREVENTION IN GREENHOUSES

Keep the relative humidity as low as practical less than 85 percent through heating and venting; warm air holds more moisture than cool air – to keep foliage dry and limit diseases heat and vent the house going into the night and again at dawn. Use HAF fans to keep air moving and dry off foliage. Leave space between plants to prevent pockets of high humidity. Keep plants on the dry side; spot water as needed to prevent over-watering some plants. Water in the morning so foliage has a chance to dry off before nightfall. Scout carefully and frequently to detect problems early; remove diseased plants promptly plus adjacent plants even if they appear healthy. Apply fungicide preventively when weather conditions are favorable for disease (i.e. wet, humid).

FLASH FREEZE UNIT AVAILABLE FOR LOW-COST GROWER USE

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture Quick Freeze Unit is located in Poultney and is available for use during the 2011 growing season. The unit is exceptionally well suited for berries. A commercial kitchen is available for processing prior to freezing. Cost to use the unit is \$10/hr, cost to use the kitchen is \$20/hr. Advance reservations are recommended but not required. The unit is available for use by any Vermont or Eastern New York farmer. Farmers and processors should contact Garland Mason at 287-2940 or MasonG@greenmtn.edu to reserve the unit. More information is available at http://www.greenmtn.edu/farm_food/food/flash-freezer.aspx

GROWER WALKS AT HIGH MOWINGS SEEDS

These free guided tours take place at the 3-acre HMS trials garden in Wolcott VT where over 800 vegetable, herb and flower varieties being grown, compared and evaluated. The tours offer a chance to learn and share information about growing specific crops, handling pests and diseases, and let you get a sneak preview of new varieties. June 22, 5:30-7 pm: spinach, lettuce, beets, radishes, and other spring-planted crops. July 24, 3-4:30pm: cucumbers, summer squash, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, and lettuce. August 21, 10am-2pm: tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, melons and more. September 21, 5-6:30pm: pumpkins, winter squash, root vegetables, fall greens, and brassicas. For more info: 802-472-6174 x101 or www.highmowingseeds.com