



VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER NEWS – June 1, 2021

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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Alburgh) Heavy frost the morning of May 29, badly burnt my 46-cultivar, 980-plant, tomato trial planting. Air was dead calm so there was radiational cooling. But the previous cold, windy week had hardened their growth, and I think they will survive. Planted within 200 yards of Lake Champlain's shoreline. So much for lake effect frost protection. Otherwise I'm preparing to plant winter squashes.

This is dairy country, here in the Champlain Islands, and the field corn is already six inches tall. It's been an early spring but now a very late frost!

(S. Royalton) In twenty-six years I have never seen so many early CPB, and in such numbers. Tons of cuke beetles as well. Except for the dryness (judging from the soil blowing off my tilled ground I'm farming in dust bowl Oklahoma) things are looking great. Few weeds germinating, garlic looks great, 4 cuts of overwintered spinach. River crazy low for this time of year, without a few good rains central Vermont could have a rough summer.

(Burlington) Slow start, quick start, which are we this year, it has seemed like both at different times. Ramping up for CSA pick-ups to begin in a week, holding off telling our members what Covid-19 practices to expect until the last possible minute, as things are changing so quickly. One of the silver linings for our 2020 CSA changes for Covid was a complete change in tables and flow, which we decided we liked much better. It reminds me how things that seem fixed in practice or space are worth evaluating periodically!

Tunnels and fields are off to a good start, particularly our indoor cukes. We frequently had a significant number of plants die during and shortly after transplanting into our unheated tunnel in early May. In the last couple of years, we've made more of an effort to flip the house from winter greens at least two weeks prior to planting, and close everything up to store up lots of heat for the cukes, which seems to have worked to reduce our early season plant losses.

(Westminster West) We came within 5 minutes of having our oldest greenhouse burn down Friday afternoon! In what seems a case of spontaneous combustion, a small pile of potting soil left outside heated up and ignited. The exhaust fans on the opposite side of the house was drawing the air and flames into the house quickly. I just happened to look up from the lower houses where I was working and saw thick smoke pouring out the exhaust fans.

I ran up to see what was burning, thinking it was a motor or rubber belt smoldering and found the outside wall engulfed in flames! I ran to the barn and grabbed the fire extinguisher and smothered the flames, then the water hose to soak the wall, grabbed a shovel to pull away the burning pile. For those that don't know, the plastic covering a greenhouse is petroleum and will burn like crazy if ignited, as well as all the wood and plastic benches inside. Our insurance company required the installation of extinguishers around the farm years ago, that's what saved this from becoming a major uninsured loss! Be prepared for the unexpected!

In other news, we used the new potato planter we ordered from Poland, a one row unit. Very nice and much quicker than planting by hand. Been crazy cold here, finally had 2 days of rain and the pond is full again!

(Elmore) Never have seen it so dry the whole month of May. Plants are wilting, especially currant bushes with berries forming on them. Perennial plants in pots are suffering as are those in the ground. Our irrigation guy for fifteen years decided not to come back, so we are on a big learning curve to get our plants the water they need, as the temps go from 27 degrees one night to 88 degrees the next day. Grateful for the cooler weather this week as the fruit tree roots go deep to get more moisture. Blueberries look loaded but have unusual frost damage or drought damage on the green new growth, first time I have seen this. Many blossoms and lots of bumblebees around doing their spring pinball moves from bush to bush.

Some days I have the whole crew standing with hoses to keep plants watered. This is not smart but these are desperate times--we can either help our customers or help our plants, I am choosing the plants; if we don't the customers will have nothing.

We had Mike Feinman's team come to straighten our high tunnel and put new plastic on it. They did a very good job and we are back in business growing vegetables, fruits and seedlings in our hi tunnel that had not had much maintenance the last seven years. Never seen so many people out there growing their food, planting, excited about it--a homegrown revolution.

(Dummerston) It's been quite a season of weather extremes. But despite or even because of some this, the crops are doing well. The cold weather through early May allowed the spinach and other greens to hold up well in the high tunnel for my spring greens CSA program. In the recent heat-wave crops have taken off in the field. The strawberries have set fruit heavily with lots of sun and irrigation and are just starting to show some color. CPB have arrived early and voles have been eating some seedlings but these are our only pest problems so far.

(Argyle NY) It went from 90 on Wednesday to a high of 52 on Friday! Makes life interesting to say the least. Irrigation was the real key during the last few weeks, and has kept us hopping while weeds grow and plants get in the ground. Strawberry picking started last week while the peas are flowering so we know the full days of harvesting are upon us. Netting has kept the flea beetles at bay and seems to be the only pest so far.

Celery that we planted in the tunnel is growing nicely as we are trying a new method of harvesting outside stalks and letting the plant stay until fall. Has high yield potential. Tomatoes are going in the ground this week along with all the usuals. As COVID restrictions are lifted our online store is holding steady and actually gaining more customers weekly. We will report on this new trend every month. Stay tuned.

(Little Compton RI) Last week, after a few hot days, we opened up our five tomato houses to full exposure to prep them for the upcoming dawg days of summer. The oilman had asked if we were done for the season. I hesitated but told him to put 100 gallons in each greenhouse for insurance. Boy did that pay off in spades! Last weekend we had 3.5" of rain, 38-mph gusts and night temperatures down to 47 degrees! I don't want to think how much botrytis and powdery mildew we would be into without being able to keep the houses at 62 degrees.

We also turned off all automatic watering and had the crew clean all the leaves off up to the first clusters. With grafted plants one has to be much more aggressive with leaf thinning; even in the middle of the plants, as they are always leaning toward going vegetative, so thinning has to be a part of the growing plan.

With increasing competition at the farmers' markets, we have made the decision to give up some greenhouse growing area profits to grow items that will show our patrons that we are the first to have certain items such as peas, pole beans and carrots long before our competition. Yes, we could make more money growing tomatoes but "having it first to market" is more important in some situations. Markets are starting out good but already we can sense that the drive behind the Covid sales of last year are dwindling and will continue to do so as the public revels in their new found freedom of choice where to spend their time and money.

The sudden shortage of available organic Kreher's fertilizer is weighing on our minds as we look toward the fall. After the winter squash and sweet potatoes go in we may need to find a different fertilizer option.

(Plainfield NH) Much needed rain has come, a little under an inch as I write this. Not a particularly friendly weather pattern so far this planting season. Lack of rain accompanied by constant winds and temp fluctuations have altered how we normally do our spring tillage and planting on our sandy soils. We have fully embraced drip under plastic and the additional costs, which has made transplanting and establishment of everything from tomato to cut flowers much easier and effective. We are also using more landscape cloth between plastic rows that are 5' on center (flowers, herbs, peppers) but still going with our low clover cover crops between things like tomatoes, cucurbits, melons etc.

Strawberries are sizing up nicely, now if we can just get a timely stretch of decent weather. I have been foliar feeding them with a small amount of nitrogen, tank mixed with fungicide, to support the plants through fruiting, and over the last couple of years it seemed to pay off in plants that were a little more robust to renovate.

Trying some fall squash and pumpkin planting direct seeded no-till to see how it goes, but still transplanting mostly, to insure getting a crop. Trying to figure out nutrient delivery with the no-till crops, as we don't have a big enough fertilizer tank or knifing system built onto our planters. Also very concerned about weed escapes and how to deal with that.

Lots of vegetables in tunnels and heated greenhouses. Spider mite problems in one cuke house, near a heater. Have been blasting the plants with N. fallacious, but not sure it's working. Two-spot mites are always difficult for us to control with predators. Tomatoes look good, but an errant vole has been destroying a house of crucifers and we can't seem to corner him.

Blueberries look ok, raspberries look fair. Wrapping up another season of banner ornamental sales, much like last year, for which we are very grateful.

VERMONT VEGETABLE PEST SCOUTING REPORTS NOW ON-LINE

With funding from the VVBGA, the Vermont Entomology and Participatory Action Research Team ([VEPART](#)) is scouting for major vegetable insects and diseases weekly over the course of the growing season at UVM's Horticultural Research and Education Center. Their reports can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3c1JADh>

MOFGA VEGETABLE PEST REPORTS

Caleb Goosen, maintaining the work established by his predecessor Eric Sideman, produces the Maine Organic Farmer and Gardener Pest Reports during the growing season. These updates describe emerging and common insects and diseases, and how to address them using organic practices. Sign up for the reports [here](#) or email cgoossen@mofga.org

UMASS VEGETABLE NOTES

The UMass vegetable team produces the Vegetable Notes [newsletter](#) which contains timely information on vegetable crop production and is published weekly during the growing season and occasionally in the off-season. They also use this mailing list to announce upcoming meetings and other opportunities. To subscribe, send the email address you'd like to subscribe to umassveg@umass.edu