

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – July 8, 2008
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Reports from the Field

(S. Royalton) Strange year, with a little moisture the weeds have finally taken off. This is the first year that weed pressure has been greater on my later corn plantings instead of the earlier ones. Melons are off to the races and have good fruit set. Early broccoli has been big and beautiful, makes for easy selling.

(Burlington) Several entomological firsts: We lost half of our spring Brassicas to cabbage root maggot -- perhaps related to the first time we haven't row covered many of them at planting, due to hot April weather. Then spider mites took down one of our tomato hoop houses -- undoubtedly FEMA agents, who would like to see the rest of them disassembled too. Now we wait for Swede Midge to return and we'll be all set! On the upside, the greens, root crops, and early cucurbits are off to a banner start, and we had a pretty good strawberry season despite the rain, characterized (as in 2007) by very low TPB damage. Though the repeated rains tested the limits of mechanical weed control, I was pleased with the ability of the vegetable knife plus flex tine combination (on our Williams Tool system) to clean up problem areas where weeds got ahead of our normal cultivation tools.

(W. Rutland) Garlic scapes are all cut and the crop is tremendous. Corn is tasseled. The potato bugs are alive and well. Water everywhere but continues to drain at an acceptable rate. The evil bean eaters are gone as are the spinach eaters. I must say that the Hornady bullets perform much better than Nosler but both are excellent in removing pests. Best thing about these products is they do not harm beneficials, only the pest.

(Cambridge) The rain has been a mixed bag. For a month now it has rained every day. The corn and flowers look great and the peas and potatoes are hanging on but the eggplant looks like it is drowning. The worst section is the Brassicas; cauliflower are dropping dead all over the field. The Brussels sprouts right next to them seemed to be okay but now they are dying off too. I can't find any critters responsible and am wondering if it is simply too much rain. Very frustrating. We are trying to keep up with the weeds but the soil never dries out enough to tackle them. On the bright side I got my earliest Sungolds ever in the greenhouse.

(Westfield) Strawberry season in full swing, plenty of nice berries the clipper didn't do much thinning this year and with the weather in June the neighbour cut their hay late so I don't have much tarnished plant bug damage. Early planting of vegetables took their time to mature, we start to have a good assortment for our CSA.

(Shaftsbury) Leafhoppers are on everything from cut flowers to all types of beans, strawberries and much more. After last year being the gold standard for strawberries this year was a somewhat moldy let down. Removed row cover from eggplant because they were out growing it. Wondering if TPB will be a problem on them, and if we should use bigger covers, but what about pollination? Sales are holding steady and seem really strong these last few weeks since school closed. This is the year I am glad we rely so much on the local folks and not on tourists for our business. Hired someone to install a seven and a half foot high, permanent wire, deer fence on much of our crop land. Wow, that has made a huge difference in getting enough sleep...oh yeah and getting better crop production.

(Plainfield NH) Strawberry crop is winding down. Fruit size was reasonably good, a little TPB damage in some of the varieties. Some heavy showers and a lot of rain between the 15th and 25th damaged fruit and there was a lot of rot to contend with. PYO demand continued strong through July 6th. Blueberry netting is up and working well (up until now, anyway) with crop coloring, and we are picking summer raspberries as well. We're also harvesting scallions, lettuces, beets, beet greens, spinach, chards, peas and bit of zukes and summer squash. Greenhouse tomatoes still seem popular at \$3.95/ lb and bunched basil and cilantro are very popular this year. Farm stand sales were strong over the 4th and now we enter the doldrums between corn season and strawberry season. I think the next two weeks will really tell us what the season is going to shape up to be. As far as insects, the regular suspects: flea beetles, hoppers, SCB, CPB, a few rose chafers. I noticed that the last couple of days have brought out the Japanese beetles and I saw a few white butterflies dancing around the broccoli yesterday, but nothing in alarmingly high numbers.

(Wolcott) Very happy cucurbit plants at this time – all putting on their first female flowers and preparing to set fruit. They seem to like the high beds made by our new mulch layer/bed former. Last week we removed the row cover from the melons and the long-season winter squashes that need a full 65-70 days to mature seed after pollination. The only crop failure so far are the two small Brassica crops that were hit hard by root maggots. These maggots seem to be getting worse every year due to the all the mild winters. It looks like we'll be planting and watering everything with nematodes until we get a more rigorous winter once again. But otherwise things look great out there.

(Rochester) A major infestation of rose chafers occupied us almost continuously for the last ten days of June. Beginning in the blackberries and migrating quickly to raspberries, they stripped many plants down to almost a skeleton before we could knock them down with organic methods. They even migrated to the blueberries and were eating sumac and damaging apple trees too. Single raspberry leaves had as many 8-12 couples, and these plants were burdened many hundreds of bugs each. At least in part we think the high population is due to the early snow and a relative lack of deep cold last winter which led to lack or absence of frozen ground. Blackberries have more buds this year, probably due to the same mild winter that helped the bugs. We saw our first Japanese beetle yesterday and are preparing for an onslaught. Despite the chafers, the crops of both raspberries and blueberries look abundant. We open for raspberry picking Wednesday July 9.

(Salisbury NH) Things are really cooking now. We've been picking string beans, lettuce, spinach, beets, baby carrots and cukes are a few days away. Finally got some much needed rain the last few weeks which also helped the weeds grow! Farm stand sales are up from last year but we've only been doing this for 3 years. We can't clone ourselves so looks like we can't do the local Farmers' Market. The two of us work full time jobs so only have nights and week-ends to work like mad. Bugs have arrived--rose chafers, cucumber beetles, Colorado potato beetles, Japanese beetles. Strawberries almost done but had a good season. Blueberries will be ready in a day or so. Lots of netting ordered this year to keep the birds away.

(Plainfield VT) Generally it's been a good strawberry season. Now that we are into our third week of picking, the weaknesses of my system are apparent. Too much leaf scorch and leaf spot, too many small berries, too much TPB damage. Still, it's hard to complain: wholesale and PYO demand have both been strong. Just starting on a big snap pea crop, and prices are high. Greenhouse cherry tomatoes are looking good, should have some ripe ones soon. Potato foliage looks great. Winter squash, peppers, paste tomatoes setting lots of fruit. Just transplanting fall Brassicas, direct seeding rutabagas and daikon, greenhouse seeding plug trays of lettuce and Chinese cabbage. Carrots are weeded, but lots of cultivating and hoeing needed everywhere. Very tired, getting old for this pace, but generally enjoying the summer.

(S. Royalton) We've been harvesting peas summer squash and zucchini for the past two weeks; cukes starting to come in and first tomatoes picked in time for Fourth of July. Flea beetles and cucumber beetles have been their usual nuisance; potato beetles appear under control with first spraying of Entrust. Starting to get weeds under control with some decent weed-killing weather. Had problems with some new row cover seems the manufacturer cut back on materials and there were enough thin spots that the flea beetles were going right through it once the Brassicas were up and growing.

UVM Plant Diagnostic Clinic Disease of the Week (by Ann Hazelrigg)

With the wet weather, I have had a few raspberry problems in the Clinic. If you are seeing canes that are wilting and dying back, one disease that could be a problem is Verticillium wilt. This soil borne fungal disease is usually a cool weather disease and is most severe in heavy poorly drained soils. Symptoms are appearing now, and will be especially evident if we have some hot dry weather. The first symptoms may just be an "off color" in the foliage followed by yellowing and wilting and death of canes. The fungus has lots of hosts including eggplant, strawberries, tomatoes, peppers and stone fruits. The fungus can survive many years in the soil and when conditions are right, the fungus penetrates roots and grows into the water conducting tissue, clogging the pipes! If you suspect the disease, cut the stem lengthwise and look for characteristic browning and streaking in the tissue. It is very obvious without a hand lens.

There is no control for the disease other than good rotations with non susceptible plants, at least 3-4 years. I have seen this disease a lot in eggplants in past years, so if you are seeing any wilting in your eggplants, look for the disease in the cut stem.

Spreader Stickers for Organic Sprays

Several growers have asked about using spreader stickers, and my advice is that they probably make sense to use with many materials given the current pattern of frequent rain. In addition, I came upon some research (by Pease and Zalom) that suggests that spray adjuvants can enhance the efficacy of some organic insecticides. Their work also shows that good coverage is essential. One study found much better control with several materials in 100 gal water/acre than when only 50 gal/acre was used. I asked Brian Caldwell, grower and organic researcher in NY, about adjuvants and he replied: "I really like Therm X-70, a yucca extract sticker-spreader. It is on the OMRI list, inexpensive, and available from Peaceful Valley and other sources. A little goes a long way! I use it at 2 oz per 100 gallons in the orchard, which is about 1/2 teaspoon per 4 gallon sprayer. I think it would help with most organic pesticides except Surround, which supposedly is best without any adjuvants. We have been having the same kind of weather here; I think it has rained 16 out of the last 17 days."

Use of pesticide names is for your information only. No endorsement is intended nor is discrimination against products not mentioned. Always read and follow the label!