

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – August 5, 2008

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Late Blight Alert!

Phytophthora blight (late blight) on potatoes has just been reported in Vermont, as well as at multiple locations in surrounding states. This is the blight that caused the Irish potato famine, and it looks a greasy blackish dieback on foliage of tomatoes and potatoes. If you look at the undersides of the leaves in the morning, you will see white sporulation. The disease can spread very rapidly under the kind of conditions we've been having (high moisture, moderate temperatures, strong winds). Scout frequently, at least twice a week, and be prepared to spray your potato and tomato crops to protect them with fungicides, or burn down or plow under affected areas to try and prevent disease spread.

Conventional fungicide options are listed in your New England Vegetable Management Guide, also on-line at: www.nevegetable.org/. Options for organic growers are very limited, and while fixed copper products may provide some protection, only a few products are allowed (www.omri.org/crops_category.pdf). Apparently only NuCop 50WP is available from local suppliers (United Ag Products, Addison VT). Champion WP had its organic approval revoked due to inert ingredients (note that NOFA-VT allows you to use up existing stock purchased when the material was still allowed), as did Kocide. Hydrogen peroxide (Storox) will kill the pathogen spores that it contacts, but has no protective or curative activity, so frequent applications would be needed.

Plant Diagnostic Clinic Report

(Ann Hazelrigg)

Still no reports of downy mildew on cukes, but it may arrive soon. For identifying it see: http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/NewsArticles/Cuc_Downy_Mar06.html With all the rain, I suspect we may see some Phytophthora root and crown rot in low lying areas in pumpkins and other crops. If your fields have had saturated soils for more than 24 hours, watch out for rapid wilting and death of plants. For management info see: <http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/NewsArticles/Phytophthora2001.htm> Bacterial wilt in squash was identified - showed up as hit or miss throughout the planting. Not much to do about it now, get the infected plants out of the field. Earlier control of cucumber beetles is the best strategy.

Tomato greenhouses are showing a fair amount of botrytis and/or leaf mold (Fulvia) depending on how much air circulation the grower is able to get through the house. Fulvia shows up as yellow spots on the top of the leaves. If you turn the leaf over, you see the velvety brown spores. Also seeing some bacterial canker showing up in tomato houses. Look for wilting on one side of tomato leaflets. This will work its way through the plant and eventually cause wilting and death. This is a nasty disease so make sure you send samples in to me at the Clinic for positive identification.

Lots of foliar leaf spots showing up on field tomatoes. The two are Septoria and Alternaria (early blight.) Management is same. The disease will continue to move up through the plant as we have more of the infection periods (wet weather) so to keep tops healthy use fungicides regularly to keep new growth protected for another few weeks. Lots of Botrytis in onions (white flecking on leaves), leafhopper damage in potatoes (tip dieback). Good job security for plant pathologists as long as it keeps raining, but I know it is a difficult situation for many growers.

Reports from the Field

(East Montpelier) Everything seems to be holding up well despite all the rain. This has been the season of the beetle: rose chafer, brown chafer in the greenhouses--lots of trouble there, potato beetle, cucumber beetle and some TPB with the peach aphids in the peppers and eggplant. I have been using the Bio-telo mulch with very nice results this year. Great product. Trying Actinovate in the greenhouses for fungus control...see how that works. Time to get back to work.

(S. Royalton) Started picking cantaloupes last week. The first ones were on the small side but have great flavor. Field seeded sweet corn is also in, though the first three plantings had a terrible germination rates due to dry weather, so I'll have to ration corn for several weeks. Onions have great size and the tops are still looking good. Every 40th one has a rotten spot on the root system, something I've never seen before.

(Cambridge) Greenhouse tomatoes are the best I've ever grown. Having those chickens in the house last fall really boosted fertility. Also applied some boron which may have helped with green shoulders I had last year. Corn and blueberries are huge and sweet. No problems there except not enough for demand. The Brussels sprouts are hanging in there but cauliflower is all but dead due to rain, wind and who knows what else. The wind also knocked down gladioli and sunflowers. Am definitely using horizontal trellising for flowers next year. Other parts of Cambridge got a tornado so I guess I won't complain too much.

(White River Junction) Hail: nearly an inch in the course of a few minutes. All greens plus zucchini wiped out, summer squash, cukes, and watermelons set back, carrots flattened but recovering. Fall brassicas were behind schedule and, as luck would have it, still in the greenhouse. Speaking of which, the plastic is now dimpled like a golf ball; will that affect light transmission? Other than that (is there anything other than that?) the summer is going well. CSA customers very supportive.

(Starksboro) 40 days and 40 nights: 14.6 inches of rain. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it. Some things look great, others are depressing. I'm kinda hoping for a break in the weather.

(Wolcott) Rain, rain, rain. I remember when I was a kid and a lightening and thunder storm was a once in a while event that was still exciting. Well it seems like here in northern Vermont it has become a daily occurrence most afternoons and evenings. We literally have been hit by a T Storm almost every day in July and looks like it is moving into August. The late July week of sun was a life saver resuscitating most crops. Overall we have low yields in zucchini and cucumbers and low fruit set on winter squash and pumpkins, lettuce drop is more prevalent even in our summer crisps, salad mix has been hard to germinate with downpours trampling them, and crops such as radishes under row cover are remaining too moist and rotting.

(Rochester) Heavy rain kept the raspberries continuously wet for about four days and promoted the spread of mold. Still, once the spoiled fruit withered, and the patch dried out, new ripenings took their place and there have been nice pickings since. Blueberries were ready a few days earlier than last year, and they look (and taste) fabulous. Japanese beetles are ubiquitous and there seem to be more earwigs and hornets in the blueberries than last year, but occasional sprayings of the affected areas with Pyganic and Aza-Direct are keeping these pests in moderate numbers. This season there are very few blue jays and cedar waxwings raiding the orchard - we started firing two morning "screamer-banger" rockets well before there was ripe fruit this year so perhaps we prevented them from getting settled by starting this routine early on.

On a positive note flea beetles have been at an all time low, and seems as though weeds are slower growing with low levels of sunshine too! We have a gorgeous crop of summer broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage and our onions (my favorite crop) still look fabulous. Field tomatoes are coming on and Septoria and Early Blight are at an all time low this year with our 6-inch raised beds with cover crop in between. Looking forward to a sunny August with lots of fun veggies to eat.

(Westminster West) OK, OK, enough with the rain already! Garlic crop all in barn, looks really good, large bulbs. Started harvesting onions a few days ago and will pick the rest of crop this week, seems to be a bit early but onions and yield look excellent, pulled a 1 1/2 lb onion already, maybe a personal best! Some of the early pumpkins are ripe and look good. Winter squash looking very good, many fruit set and setting and the early varieties will be ready this week. Some squash bugs but not a big problem yet. Tunnel raspberries are coming in and yield is good but having issues with wasps eating berries! Tomatoes selling as fast as they ripen. Aphids showing up on tunnel melons, will spray tomorrow. Cools nights, could use a bit more heat but not complaining, all is well in what is so far a record season!

(Tunbridge) Normally we would be way too busy to be emailing in a report but not much to do after a double whammy. The hail and 65mph winds 2 weeks ago did a lot of short term damage. All trellised items got slammed; we had put a lot of time into our sugar snap trellis this year because they sell. Not much we could do to save them from pock marks and breakage of the tops of the plants that were higher than our 6 foot trellis.

Onion tops got hammered but onions are still sizing up and we are moving them out as fresh with not so much top. It takes a lot of work to make them pretty. The basil was trashed, we had to go and cut it; it's growing back, but not the quality. Thank goodness for garlic-it is in the barn, we have the fans on it. Usually after 2 weeks we can turn them off, but there is still dampness in the stems and not much drying weather in sight. Of course we could have bounced back from the hail with a good fall to look forward to, but as I suspect like a lot of other folks we were unable to plant fall greens in a timely manner. We like to have them peak around Labor Day when our customers are peaking.

Well since I can't change the weather, I am trying hard to change my mind set, but it is hard when things were sooo good just two weeks ago. We were able to seed a few things Friday afternoon since we were not picking our normal August payloads. Beans rotted and field tomatoes including cherry tomatoes have been in a holding pattern. I joked with my workers during the dry May that we may be painting the house this year. The thought crossed my mind again on Friday trying to keep folks busy without all the time consuming crops to pick. Well if the law of averages holds, last year being as close to perfect as I have seen, this was to be expected.

(Woodbury, VT) I didn't think it could rain any more. Even with our well-drained soils, we are having problems. I am holding onto most of what is left, but the fall crops are becoming threatened. My hope is that the headway made from good plant sales in the spring will buffer out losses in the upcoming weeks. My customers at market are very supportive, and understand the relationship between the weather and vegetables. Sales are still strong with what we are bringing. Some sunny weather would go a long way.

(Wolcott) Our first seed crops have been harvested! So far we have in the chives, evergreen onions, a crop of biennial Sweet William, and an early salad green brassica called Hon Tsai Tai. All look great so far, but we won't have any germination test results for another month or more. We're also just beginning the very long season of tomato harvest for seed. We'll harvest five to ten varieties a week from early August until frost. These get crushed, fermented, and then rinsed and dried. As the varieties start to ripen we flag particularly nice plants for stock seed, and then those plants get harvested separately from the main crop. It's a lot of labeling and record-keeping for the crew, but it's worth it to improve the stock seed every time we do a production. So far the fungal diseases haven't gotten too horrible yet, but with all this rain I'm just waiting for the explosion to happen. The regular spray schedule will help, but it won't stop a major event.

(Little Compton RI) Still on the learning curve about Northeast garlic: we were in a serious drought down in southern New England and long Island up to about a week ago....

Our garlic (which we grew in an un-irrigated field) really suffered and came in three weeks earlier than expected! Which means by the time we got around to pulling it, it had split off a lot of their protective covers. We now know to watch this more carefully if they are under stress.

A discussion with Ruth Hazard introduced us to some other new thoughts about garlic: be careful not to bang the excess dirt off the bulbs, remember they are as delicate as a fresh picked apple; bang dirt off on the broad fork your digging with will lead to rot in that area months later; power drying in shaded greenhouses with roll up sides and H.A.F. fans is faster and better than moldy barns. We cut the tops down to six inches and invert them (bottoms up) on our empty wire benches in the greenhouse. Once they are dry. Keep them in a cooler: the new info out on garlic is dry and cool. Ruth says 38 to 40 degrees is ideal; the worst situation is in a wood unventilated crate on or near a cement floor. Keep in mind that cement floors sweat like crazy on certain warm rainy days. All that moisture and lack of dry air can do a number on your storage garlic. A good tip for those of you doing business with restaurants: keep an eye out for a large chest freezer going to the dump; we got one from the one we service and found it to be an excellent storage facility for cover crop grains and chicken food; we have had a rodent problem up until the point we started using the freezer for storage.

(Salisbury NH) Seems like thunderstorms almost every evening. Good for watering but hard to find time to pick. Blueberries bushes have been loaded but made the 'mistake' of putting out blueberry maggot lures. We have the flies. Only a matter of time before the maggots but we have customers who don't want us to spray. Our scientific study indicates they taste like blueberries! Seriously, we sat on the fence wondering whether to spray or pray. We've been doing 'counter tests' and so far haven't seen any maggots. What a pain. Finally have corn to sell along with almost every other vegetable you can think of. Not many people want cabbage at this time of year. Must be people aren't making their own coleslaw. The tomatoes are still green at this point. "If" we get our hoop house up this fall, maybe next year we'll have tomatoes when people start asking. The weeds have finally won the battle. Pull a few each time I'm picking something. Red potatoes have been good seller. Hard to believe August is here and the days are already getting shorter. Wishing everyone lots of success!

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!