



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News May 25, 2015

(S. Royalton) I've never seen this before, it dropped 5 degrees in 30 minutes from 3:30 to 4 in the morning. We went from no dew and a slight breeze to an instant freeze. Damage everywhere but could have been worse as a rising sun saved us. Dry, dry, dry with low RH and sun; my sandy loam requires daily water to get transplants started. This makes three dry springs in a row for us. Farming gets harder every year, not because of my age but the weather is nuts.

(Huntington) Looking at a monthly precipitation map for New England, we are in one of the only swaths that has seen adequate rainfall; I hadn't realized that we were beneficiaries of such good fortune. It looks worse and worse the farther south and east one looks on the map. Even with "normal" precipitation, 3 of our first 5 spinach seedlings has gone into relatively dry ground. Surprisingly, our 800 ft. elevation mountain valley location did not get frosted during Friday night's cold front, though a few acres of row cover were deployed on newly transplanted winter squash as insurance. Our squash plants went in a few days before I would have preferred, with the cool, dry wind of this week causing severe windburn on the older (leggy) leaves. The young leaves and buds are looking fine, but I will be interested to see what the mortality rate is in the field. Greenhouse eggplant is in a house adjacent to last year's potato field, so we saw our first CPB last week. It sure has been good bare-fallowing weather.

(Plainfield) Greenhouse retail sales solid. Flea beetles under control in kale with one Entrust spray. Good soil moisture on sandy soils, due to some timely rains, some irrigation and lots of OM turned in over the years. Greenhouse tomatoes getting settled. Peppers and winter squash to go out this coming week. Finally got some hybrid green kale seed (FEDCO has Darkibor.) Letting my fall raspberries make a summer crop as an experiment. No sign of cane borer yet.

(Shrewsbury) Numerous blueberry branch lesions were diagnosed by Ann Hazelrigg last fall as hail damage from the May 2014 storm. At the time, small broken branches, destroyed leaves and blossoms were found everywhere. However, this spring we experienced much more branch die back than usual due to multiple branch lesions combined with a bitter winter. Medium sized dead branch clusters were removed from most older bushes. The plus side is that many of these older bushes needed thinning this spring anyway. Thanks to Ann for her expert diagnosis and insights.

(Marlboro) Lucked out the other night and we were spared the frost: low of 33. Half of the blueberries are in full blossom and hardy transplants are all in. We've never seen it so dry in the spring, though. Have had less than 0.2" of rain all of May. We've been spending way more time than we'd like watering, setting up irrigation and getting existing irrigation up and running. Some of the tender vegetable transplants are going in this week. They are ready and I am tired of babysitting them.

The new "glass house" is cranking out spinach, mesclun and kale allowing us to open the farm stand several weeks earlier than usual. It was built using windows which had lost their seal and came through the winter just fine. Cane borer is quite bad in the Prelude raspberries this year. I know I'm weeding them later than usual, so perhaps I haven't noticed other years and their vigor makes up for it.

(Dummerston) No frost here from the recent cold snaps. Lots of time spent covering though, not to mention irrigating. Cyclamen mites in the strawberries. I'll be trying Cucumeris predatory mites to control them. Rats got into every bag of ProGro in the toolshed: need some predators for them. CSA sales are catching up. With luck it might even fill up by the first pick-up. Cute goat babies hopping around the farm always helps.

(Plainfield NH) Scattered showers since snowmelt have not provided adequate moisture to plant, so we are irrigating like we haven't prior to planting and mulch laying as well as after. It stretches our labor force and is a huge added expense. What would a good solid inch of water be worth right now if we could buy it? Certainly many thousands of dollars. We have survived the past four frost events and look forward to getting some sleep.

Early spring fallows on our winter squash and potato ground have been working well to reduce chickweed, lambsquarters and shepherd's purse which germinated early in the spring. Planned cover crops are a combination of Japanese millet, sun hemp, and sunflower. This will be grazed by the draft horses in late July and early August when the pastures slow. We had our first whole farm meeting two weeks ago and are working to establish systems of communication for employee and farm needs. We couldn't be more excited to be working with such a solid and engaged team.

(Little Compton RI) Of all our problems the wind continues to challenge us daily! 55 mph gusts and super dry wind really taking its toll this year. For the first time ever, I am pulling a crew member off planting and bed prep to just manage constant water needs: what a spring, and cold to boot. Really liking Dragoon and Breen small lettuces that can be planted real tight and give a great bang for the buck and bed space. I am still on the fence about Salanova.

(Argyle NY) Never seen such crazy spring weather! We only had 3/10 inch of rain since snowmelt and the irrigation pond is very low with daily water going on all fields. It has been easier getting crops seeded and cultivated without heavy rains but really want rain. Most crops doing well though flea beetles have come out so the 25gram netting (Biothrips) has been in use for several weeks on the arugula. It works much better for us than row cover. Our high tunnel crops of spinach, kale, chard, lettuce, salad mix and radishes are done or nearly done with summer crops transitioned in. Onions were just planted out on white plastic (Biotelo), which we found to be beneficial over the black last year. We have been blessed with a great crew this year.

SUMMER VEG AND BERRY FARM WORKSHOPS

NOFA-VT has worked with the VVBGA to organize these events. Dates and locations are listed at <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/?Page=meetlist.html>. Links with details to follow soon.

SOIL FERTILITY SURVEY

UVM Extension wants to better serve your soil fertility information needs. We've compiled a brief survey to get your input and to help us understand what practices and amendments growers across the state and the region are currently using. We'd be grateful if you take the survey soon. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/soilfert>