Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 1, 2024

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Hinesburg) Over wintered and spring planted greens abundant and largely good quality harvests. Spinach did better this year with less row cover. Overwintered onions looking best ever, but already thrips on them. Will try nematodes for thrips. Rhizoctonia on claytonia, and possibly another disease - too warm and damp this winter. Luckily (?) the volunteer claytonia in another house grew much better than the late October-planted carrot experiment and produced abundant yields.

(Burlington) Nice to have a fairly 'normal' April. So many months seem abnormal that the typical months stand out. With the mild winter our winter greens finished with a bang: great productivity, low disease pressure, and a modest number of aphids. Hopefully we have our cleanup and biocontrols in place to keep a lid on things as we shift over to cucumbers and tomatoes. We are testing out a few new tomatoes and cucumber varieties and trying some closer spacing in the cukes, but mostly doing the same old same old. Grafting was a huge success this year, hats off to our grafting team!

Spring-planted high glucosinolate mustard and pea-oat cover crops are up and staring to grow for real, as is the chickweed that lurks in the understory of an unfortunate number of cover crops. We'll be trying to crowd out our chickweed problems with a bit more spring tillage of failing cover crops that we follow with a Sudangrass-sunn hemp mix, followed up with rye or oats in the autumn.

First round of brassicas, direct seeded roots, herbs, scallions, and our acre of onions are all in the ground. A few nippy nights over the last 10 days, but nothing that will scare those crops too much. Happy for the bit of rain over the weekend as we were starting to need to water and April irrigation always makes me slightly cross. It's going to be a great year!

(Guildhall) It's been a good spring here generally. Fairly cold, and the potatoes we have left in storage have been keeping very well. Sales of the 2023 crop are still strong and I expect we'll be selling until June first. I think there's less than 100k lbs. to move thank goodness. Soraya and Peter Wilcox have been particularly good varieties storage wise this year. We've been trucking seed out of Aroostook County and the Adirondacks all month pretty steady. Field work has only just begun. That said I'll probably take a break from tillage next week and plant our reds and early chippers before moving back into tillage. Just give those early ones a little bump.

(Westminster) We thought the season would get off to a slow start because of late snowstorms. But the snow melted fast and we're right on time. Three plantings of lettuce and a planting of kale and collards are in; beets are seeded and we set our first sweet corn transplants. It was a dry week – but then a timely rain came. Looks like we'll start cutting greens the first week of June, if the weather stays steady.

We're growing fewer greens this year, especially lettuce, and more late season storage crops. We've given up on growing broccoli, except a small amount for our farmstand – black rot has been rampant in recent years due to wet weather.

The first H-2A workers from Jamaica arrived. We're happy to have them, but the program's adverse effect wage rate (the minimum wage we're required to pay all our workers) has climbed steadily every year and we're worried that's not sustainable. We went to D.C. with the National Farmers Union and some other New England growers to talk about that issue with the Senate Agriculture Committee, so we'll see if the federal government ends up doing something to help the farmers.

(Grand Isle) Finished up all the blueberry pruning last week. Plants look good. The two-day cold snap appears to have not done any damage to the blueberry plants here. The flower buds are starting to open.

(Huntington) I haven't seen any official stats, but greenhouse growth rates indicate a decided lack of sun these last 7 weeks. Speaking of clouds, the sound of heaters running mid-day in April is always an unwelcome addition to the farm's collection of noises.

Despite that general coolishness, our ground thawed out very early this spring, and the rains have been periodic enough to allow field work to be performed on a relatively relaxed schedule.

Last year we got a CEAP grant to help buy a larger and more precision-oriented Kuhn MDS 18.2 3pt hitch fertilizer spreader, and I really have appreciated its metering accuracy. It also has the ability to shut off spinners individually, which allows for spreading along field borders without having to decide whether to under-fertilize the crop ground, or spread a bunch of fertilizer in the verge or drive lanes off to the side.

With so many fields relatively close to the Huntington River, it was funded as a way to reduce nutrient loading in the riparian buffer. And with the price of potassium sulfate, poultry pellets, etc., it's nice to be able to set a rate, calculate a field size, and have those numbers generate an accurate measurement of how much fertilizer to load into the hopper.

(Plainfield NH) As temps have moderated and nights have gotten considerably warmer, we have started field tillage in earnest. Some early roots and sweet corn are in the ground; we will be facing the potatoes next, then strawberries and onions. Recent drying winds have us river bottom dwellers looking for some showers to settle the dust.

A good start on woodpiles for the family, and some of the H2A help has arrived with the Jamaican embassy holding two elderly gents, hopefully for not much longer. Lots of cole crops, tomatoes, herbs going into the high tunnels.

Aphids are a struggle for us this year, I am assuming they are foxglove aphids as the beneficials have not been as effective on this species. So far, no measurable whitefly. Inoculating the tomatoes, peppers and cukes with Neoselius californicus in hopes of checking the spider mite populations from blooming when it gets hot and dry. The first round of water testing is done, and the crew remains mostly healthy. So far, so good.

POLLINATOR SUPPORT REPORT
Laura Johnson, UVM Extension Pollinator Support Specialist

Check out some these new resources about specific crop pollinators and how to support them. "Know Your 5" crop pollinator guides are available for Apple, Blueberry, Brambles, Ground Cherry and Tomatillo, Squash, Stone Fruit, and Strawberry at UVM Extension's Pollinator Support webpage. Click on the "Know your 5" factsheet series drop down menu at https://www.uvm.edu/extension/pollinator-support-resources

If you are excited about wild (or managed!) bees pollinating your spring fruit crops, they can often be found feeding on early blooming tree blossoms prior to fruit crop bloom. Serviceberry (Amelanchier spp.), with small showy white blossoms, is one insect pollinator attractive tree now blooming in field margins. Unfortunately, this tree species can also be prone to the same pests and diseases as apples and pears, including fire blight (Erwinia amylovora).

Orchard Pests and Pollinators On-Farm Meetings – two locations.
May 9, 4:30-7:00, Sweetland Farm, 97 Kerwin Hill Road, Norwich, VT
May 10, 4:30-7:00, UVM Catamount Farm, 65 Green Mountain Drive, S. Burlington, VT

These are free, hands-on field meetings to increase your identification skills and understanding of common orchard pests, wild pollinators, beneficial insect habitat in tree fruit production. Pesticide applicator (2) and Certified Crop Adviser (2) credits available.

Blueberry Plant Health and Pollinators
May 22, 4:00-6:00, Covered Bridge Blueberry Farm, Underhill.

This free, hands-on field meeting will cover fertilization, mulching, pruning and pest control for plant health, and supporting blueberry pollinators on the farm. Pesticide applicator and Certified Crop Adviser credits pending. Questions? Laura.o.johnson@uvm.edu or 802-656-4827

VVBGA MEMBERS - CREATE YOUR FREE PICK YOUR OWN LISTING

Now's the time to take 5-10 minutes get your information in the system, before the public launch next month of this brand-new effort to promote pick your own sales to the public. You will be able to make changes to your listing as often as you like. It's easy!

1) Login to your VVBGA member account at https://vvbga.org/
2) Click “Pick-Your-Own-Listing” on the left-hand menu.
3) Click the orange “Add Your Listing” button.
4) Click on each section of the listing. A drop down will appear. Fill in all the details relevant to your farm’s PYO operation.
5) Hit the "Save” button at the bottom of the page after you complete your listing.

TECH TIPS FROM UVM EXTENSION AG ENGINEERING
Andy Chamberlin

Here are the two latest podcast episodes from The Farmer's Share. Go to:
https://thefarmersshare.com
Adam’s Berry Farm – Field Walk/Farm Tour: EP18
Adam’s Berry Farm – Berry Farm Business Development: EP19

UPDATE FROM THE UVM PLANT DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC
Ann Hazelrigg, Plant Pathologist

Abiotic disorders. Plants do weird things this time of year and most damage you see early in the season is abiotic (non-infectious). If you see damage on foliage (yellowing, wilting, leaf-spotting, failure to thrive) always check the roots first to see if there are healthy white roots present.

Root rots are the main infectious disease that can be present this time of year and will lead to problems in the upper part of the plant. To check for root rot pull some plants and if brown slimy roots are obvious, start over with clean soil/flats. If the roots look good, check to see if the damage you are seeing is on one age of tissue. This is often the case if there was cold damage when that set of leaves was small and vulnerable or when plants are put in cold soils. Always check to see what the new growth looks like. If that growth is coming out healthy, there is a healthy root system and this is another clue that an earlier abiotic issue caused the damage.

Common abiotic issues this time of year are ethylene damage (curling and twisting of foliage) due to improperly vented heater/damaged heaters, edema (corky blisters on leaf undersides that form when weather is cool and cloudy), leaf spotting and purpling of foliage due to anthocyanin formation as a result of cold temperatures.

Blueberry updates. Fruiting bodies were present on mummified blueberries last week in Chittenden County so mummyberry inoculum is out there and active. The way to avoid the disease is to apply a new layer of mulch (at least 2”) to cover infected berries in late winter/early spring. Growing several cultivars is helpful, too, since they bloom at different times and therefore are vulnerable to infection at different times. The pathogen produces two kinds of spores, one that comes from the fruiting bodies on the mummies that infect green tissue on buds and shoots followed by a secondary spore from these initial infections that is often carried by pollinators to blossoms. Conducive weather (wet) is necessary for infection.

For more info on mummyberry: https://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/mummyberry.html. For pictures and more info: https://www.canr.msu.edu/blueberries/uploads/files/E2846%20Mummy%20Berry%20Facts.pdf

Blueberries are usually pretty disease free. It helps to grow them at the right soil pH (4.5-5.2). For info on lowering pH in soils with sulfur, including a table of amounts to incorporate see: https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/files/Lowering_Soil_pH_with_Sulfur.pdf. If plants are already in place, then apply surface applications of 400 lbs./acre elemental sulfur each year until pH is in optimal range (4.8 - 5.2).

Here is a summary of practices to manage to optimize highbush blueberry production: https://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/Information_For_Highbush_Blueberry_Growers.pdf

If you are seeing any disease or pest that is concerning on your farm, please feel free to send pictures to me at ann.hazelrigg@uvm.edu. If I don't recognize what is going on, I may ask for a sample to be mailed.