Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – August 24, 2010

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Royalton) The corn that was flattened by the micro spout in mid-July has completely recovered and is in full swing, as is all of the other corn. We have had no corn borers this year; the tomato worms on the other hand are fierce. I'm just happy that we have a reason to complain about any insect pest on the tomatoes. The field tomatoes are in full swing, no sign of late blight. The early blight has actually made picking easier, clearing out the lower vegetation. Watermelons are ripe; garlic looks the best it has in years. Some powdery mildew starting on cukes and squash, but I'm sick of picking and pickling. New cilantro, beets, carrots, dill and snap beans producing (planted in early July). Will plant the hoophouses for winter crops for farm use soon. We planted our potatoes really late this year; they just flowered early August. Peas planted in mid-July love the cool August nights.

(Rochester) Summer raspberries are done. Fall varieties are yet to arrive, although nice buds are showing. Blueberries continue to amaze us and our u-pickers for their quantity and quality. We seem to be on track for a close-to-record blueberry yield despite the spring frosts that took out a percentage of the Patriots. Our Illini Hardy blackberries have nice fruit set and the first berries are just being picked--about 3 weeks early like everything this season. Hopefully the first fall frost will be late (is mid-October too much to hope for?) and we will get most of this fruit in. Getting tired now. Praying for rain, not just for the non-irrigated field but to get a guilt-free day off.

(Starksboro) Well, had I written only 2 days ago I would have said: We could use a little rain. Now I'm saying: We've had a nice dry spell, but with this streak of rainy days, and late blight lurking all around us, I'm feeling a bit nervous. However, a decent season...so far.

(Westminster West) Onions are out; cover crops of field peas and triticale are in. Nice size storage onions: Prince and Gunnerson. Candy for sweet also did very well in spite of the extremely dry season. Started picking some winter squash and will harvest all including pumpkins by Sept. 2nd. Yields are mixed, depending on which field due to the drought, might be 30% off from last year's yield. High tunnel raspberries coming in better now that the spider mites are mostly dead. Tomatoes have lots of cracking in the fruit but selling well anyway. We passed the GAP certification, a big relief for us and can now focus on harvest and other issues.

(West Rutland) Critters come and critters go, but when and where nobody knows. Slightly corny I know but that is how it's been this year. Usually I am sending whistling missiles thru the air at furry veg destroyers from late April till July, this year it was May only. The winged terrors from the swamp usually descend upon the corn in late August, but it was the first of August this year. Swirling knots of black death surge up and around only to descend upon a field of quaking corn. But never fear, the Reaper is here. For close quarter engagements with devastating impact the Reaper is second to none. Of course one must be laying in wait and hidden before the black death arrives. Do that three of four times and the black death goes away.

Oh, just one thing, them scare eye balloons kind a shred if the Reaper is applying dispersant close by. So as always, professionals only; kids don't try this at home! Biggest and best garlic crop I have ever pulled from the ground was 2010. Demand is very good so if it continues, I should be sold out pretty quick and can finally get to some fall trout fishin.

(Little Compton RI) The drought in Southern New England continues! It is an added burden to an already busy day when you are short handed. But there are always lessons to be learned even in the worst of times. We have come to using 'orchard micro sprinklers' for establishing root crops. These 360 degree misters really do the trick for getting the soil to just the right level to get those seeds out of the ground. With carrots, after the seeds are up we cultivate and then switch to 4" emitter drip tape to keep the moisture right where we need it. So this is how they grow vegetables in Israel! That is where, I heard, drip tape was invented. Another big lesson is if you start watering plants like peppers don't stop! One pump broke and it took us a week to get around to fixing it and in that time the peppers which got water everyday completely crashed versus the ones on another farm, which never got any water yet were still pumping out some peppers; they were sad and small but that is a drought.

(Grand Isle) The farm is humming along nicely thanks to our great crew and excellent weather: not too hot and not too cold, just right. The fall crops look good, but we are waiting for the winter squash and pumpkins to size up. We did not transplant any this year, just direct seeded, and the result is crops with a more extensive root system, able to withstand dryer weather.

(Salisbury NH) Finally got rain: two inches! Prior to that we only had 3 other rains, each about 1/3 inch. Fields are powder dry. Potatoes succumbed to leaf hopper damage; at least it wasn't late blight! Read that certain varieties of potatoes are more susceptible to hopper damage – like Red Norland which of course we grew. Pepper and eggplant yields almost nothing. Have some flowers and small fruits now that might make it if we don't get an early frost. If anyone has an organic solution for tarnished plant bug damage on strawberries, I'd like to hear it. We planted 500 Seascape plants this spring. Had beautiful crop started late July and every darn one has TPB damage. I might be able to make a batch of strawberry jam and that's it. Next year we're bringing in the big guns. Previous year we grew spinach all year with lots of rain. We're on a hill and could handle all the water but this year with temperatures so high we couldn't even get it to germinate. Fall crop finally coming but we'll see how it does without much moisture. Carrots were similar problem with lack of moisture, poor germination. Fall peas growing nicely if weather cooperates. Farm stand sales are pretty steady and seem to have larger customer base. People are finally making the trek up our driveway.

UVM PLANT DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC REPORT

From Ann Hazelrigg: Swede midge found in Hinesburg. Hosts include cruciferous vegetable crops including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, collards, rutabagas, and radish. This farm saw damage mainly in kale, brocolli and cauliflower. Pest also attacks wild mustard, shepard's purse, stinkweed, field peppergrass, and yellow rocket. Symptoms include no head forming, young shoots/leaf stalks can be swollen, distorted or crinkled, brown scarring on head and along the leaf stalks, multiple stems. There are 3-5 generations of this pest/year and it is new to Vermont so be on the lookout. For pictures and more info go to http://www.massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/swedemidge.html.

No new samples of late blight. Lots of gardeners/growers say they have it but all have turned out to be early blight or septoria leaf spot. With the recent wet weather, be sure to scout on a daily basis. Visited a field in northern Vermont with confirmed late blight and they were keeping it at bay with copper fungicides. If wet cool weather continues, it may prove hard to control with fungicides.

Have seen a lot of scab on non resistant zucchinis causing little pinpoint spots on the fruit filled with spores of the fungus. Most cukes have resistance but this zucchini obviously did not! I have looked at lots of potato samples with leaf edge dieback attributed to potato leaf hopper damage. Usually I find early blight in there too. Early varieties are hit the worse. Also have seen a lot of spider mite damage on beans from the hot dry period we had this summer. With the cooler temps, the plants are "growing out" of the damage.

PUMPKIN HARVESTAND STORAGE TIPS
(Adapted from UMass Extension Vegetable Notes)

Ideally, pumpkins should be harvested when fully mature, with a deep orange color and hardened rind. However, as long as pumpkins have started to turn color, they will ripen off the vine if held under the proper conditions. While not ideal, this may be preferable to leaving them in the field, where diseases, wildlife, and cold temperatures can reduce quality. Pumpkins can be ripened in a well-ventilated barn or greenhouse. The best conditions for rapid ripening are 80-85 degrees F with a relative humidity of 80-85%. However the fruit will ripen at 'room temperature" too, but more slowly. Night temperatures should not drop below 60 degrees.

Once ripe, pumpkins should be stored in a cool, dry place, ideally 50-60 degrees with relative humidity of 50-70%. If the humidity is higher you may get condensation on fruit, increasing risk of disease; lower humidity can cause dehydration. If the temperature is higher, increased respiration can cause weight loss; lower temperatures cause chilling injury. Fruit placed in storage should be free of disease, decay, insects, and unhealed wounds. Handle with care. Once the rind is bruised or punctured, decay organisms will invade. Place fruit gently in containers and move bins on pallets. Use gloves to protect both the fruit and the workers.

RASPBERRY FALL CHECKLIST
(adapted from Sonia Schloemann, UMass Extension)

Encourage hardening off of canes in summer bearing varieties by avoiding N fertilizers and supplemental watering at this time. Do not remove spent floricanes until later in the winter unless they are significantly infected with disease (they are still moving energy down to the roots). Fall bearing raspberries can still benefit from irrigation in dry weather to help maintain fruit size. Based on soil and tissue test results, apply non-nitrogen containing fertilizers and lime as needed. For example, sul-po-mag or epsom salts can be applied now so that fall rains can help wash it into the root zone for the plants. Fall bearing raspberries can suffer fruit rot problems due to increased moisture from more frequent precipitation, longer dew retention, and longer nights late in the growing season. The majority of this fruit-rot is Botrytis cinerea (gray mold). Frequent harvesting and cull-harvesting are the best practices. Thinning canes in dense plantings can also help. Check plantings for crown borers; the adult looks like a very large yellowjacket but is actually a moth. They are active in the field in August and September laying eggs. Scout the fields for crown borer larvae damage by looking for wilting canes.

This symptom can also indicate Phytophthora root rot, so when you find a plant with a wilting cane (or two), dig up the plant and check the roots for brick red discoloration in the core of the roots, or the presence of a crown borer larvae in the crown. Rogue out infested crowns; eliminate wild bramble near the planting, since they can harbor more of this pest (as well as viruses).

PLANT WINTER COVER CROPS SOONER RATHER THAN LATER
(adapted from UMass Extension)

Establishing small grain winter cover crops like rye, oat or wheat after vegetables are harvested is a good way to reduce soil erosion and runoff during the late fall and winter. These cover crops are also known to take up available nitrogen that remains in the soil as nitrate after the harvest of crops. The nitrate may come from unused fertilizer, or it may be released from decomposing manures or compost. Capturing this 'extra' soil nitrate with cover crops helps minimize nitrate leaching to ground water, and it also 'stores' nitrogen in the cover crop biomass, some of which will be released for use by subsequent crops as the covers are broken down by microbes. Research at UMass and elsewhere indicates that crops like rye and oats do a better job of capturing nitrate and preventing leaching when they are sown in August rather than September. This makes sense since the more time the covers have to grow, the more extensively their roots can colonize the soil and take up nutrients. So don't delay, clean up your fields as soon as harvests are complete and sow a winter cover crop.

RETAIL PRODUCE PRICE REPORTS

The latest retail price reports from growers in Vermont and vicinity will soon be posted at: http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/ProducePriceReports.html. Please report prices at: http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/?Page=marketing/price_survey.html&SM=marketing/sub-menu.html

UPCOMING EVENTS See http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/meetlist.html

Sept. 8, 5-7 pm. Fresh Produce Food Safety Practices for Direct Market Farms. Cedar Circle Farm, East Thetford, VT

Sept. 14, 5-7 pm. High Tunnel Design and Installation Edgewater Farm, Plainfield, NH

Sept. 15, 4-6 pm. On-Farm Soil Management, Arethusa Farm, Burlington, VT