The GROWING season: Finally
It will be nice for everyone to see their heat loving crops finally starting to grow. The roots of cucurbits, tomatoes, peppers and eggplants don’t operate much at low soil temperature, so you may be seeing signs of deficiency, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, or you may be seeing plants that are just going yellow in general. Hopefully this warmth and sunshine will turn that around.

Pay attention to all that new growth: all the rain most likely has leached some nitrogen, regardless of what kind of N-sources you use. You may want to be ready to fertigate or side-dress. I saw some kale today that had been picked for a few weeks and it was already looking pretty pale.

Beet Leafminer is going crazy. Here’s some lambsquarter growing on a compost pile. See all those brown, damaged leaves? That’s the same leafminer. This is a tough pest to beat because it has a happy home here, even if you are rotating your chard, beets, and spinach plantings.

Planning for Tomato Diseases
Unless you are growing on newly opened ground, your tomatoes will be subject to pressure from our resident foliar diseases, Septoria leaf spot and Alternaria early blight, both of which are fungal, and bacterial spot and bacterial speck. With all the damp weather around, it’s easy to become concerned. A large scale grower told me he had been advised that diseases will be coming up on southerly winds. That is true, but there is a pretty reliable network of extension people reporting occurrences of these diseases, and this information is available on-line. The most infamous of these (on tomato and potato) is Late Blight. You can find sightings by county here: http://usablight.org/map. Currently, two counties in Southern Florida are reporting late blight, but in my conversation with Meg McGrath of Cornell University in Long Island, it turns out that her colleague in West Virginia has yet to report a confirmed sighting in that state... so the map isn’t always perfectly up to date, but it’s still a valuable resource. So at this time, there is no reason at all to be protecting for this disease. On the other hand, those diseases that overwinter in New England should be paid attention to. The bacterial diseases, if present, can be found at any time. If you have a history of these in your field, and you haven’t rotated, then a copper product is advised at this time. There are a few copper “soaps” on the market now that are very good protectants, and at least one of them is OMRI approved. If you have a bacterial leaf spot and you do not have a history of it in your field, it may possibly come in on your seed. It does happen. The fungal diseases, unlike the bacterial, USUALLY attack older foliage that is lacking in nutrients and down in the shady canopy.
It would be surprising to see either of them at this time of year. Both also really don’t take off until there’s some warmth, and until this weekend, we’ve had just about none of that. So I was surprised to find some early blight lesions on some plants of a short season variety growing out of peat bags on landscape fabric, and not inside a tunnel. What we did figure out is that the row cover that had been used on these plants had also been used on tomatoes the previous season. It must be that some inoculum had been on the row cover and was raining down on the plants. You can even see the green tomato plant stains on the fabric in this picture below. To monitor current conditions to see if it’s conducive to disease development, check out TomCast and BliteCast: http://newa.cornell.edu/index.php?page=tomato-diseases-tomcast

There have been complaints of aphids on numerous crops. It’s not surprising since plants haven’t been growing vigorously and many growers have needed to leave their row covers in place in order to get some daytime warmth. (There have even been nighttime lows below 40 in a few spots.) Now that warmth is just about here, the aphids will up their game. Look into the growing tips of plants that might seem fine while standing above them. If you aren’t seeing many aphid “mummies”, then you should consider a control measure, but start with one that won’t be harmful to beneficials, such as parasitoid wasps and syrphid flies (a.k.a. hoverflies), whose larvae (below left) consume aphids with a dramatic show of lifting them up in the air to suck their insides out. Very heroic.

Finally, if you are inland, prepare to BAKE from Sunday through Tuesday. This is not the case in coastal areas. This means that all that water in the soil is going to get drawn up by your plants and directly out of your soil if you don’t have some kind of mulch layer in place. And with the heat, of course, will come the PIGWEED...