The week in vegetables...

Potato Leafhoppers have arrived

Potato leafhoppers do not overwinter in New England but arrive on warm southerly winds, and here they are (adult top left, nymphs bottom left, early hopper burn, right).

Hopper burn is caused by feeding of these sucking insects. It’s too early to find nymphs but if you allow adults of these sucking insects to get established, you’ll soon have serious damage. To check for them on your potatoes, eggplants and beans, gently knock the leaves: of present, you’ll see small, translucent, light green insects take off and dart over to other leaves. They tend to spend more time on leaf under-sides. If you choose to spray for them, make sure you get good coverage from below, and apply early while it’s cool, especially if using a knockdown insecticide that requires contact.

Chewing insect alert: Both striped cucumber beetles and Colorado potato beetles are out in full force.

Cucumber beetles have been around for several weeks but the flush of heat really brought them around in big numbers, and once they start feeding, chemical signals (aggregation pheromones) act like a dinner bell for everyone in the area. They can take down small plants very quickly, and when they attack larger plants, they can transmit bacterial wilt. Furthermore, they are now laying eggs in the soil at the base of your cucumber and squash plants. Larvae feed on the roots. They can be knocked back with pyrethrum and synthetic pyrethroids, as well as Sevin. BE CAREFUL NOT TO SPRAY WHEN POLLINATORS ARE PRESENT. The best time is very early in the morning before flowers have opened.

Potato beetle eggs are now hatching. Fortunately, a new (old) product has been brought back onto the market: a B.t. that is specific to beetle larvae. Trident controls small larvae very well, large larvae so-so. Timing your sprays is important.
**Diseases of Cucurbits:** The damp weather, followed by warmth and humidity, is cause to pay attention to your cucurbits for signs of disease. UMass Veg Notes has an excellent writeup this week on these problems. Have a look here: http://extension.umass.edu/vegetable/publications/vegetable-notes-newsletter/archives

**Onion thrips populations are building!!** These tiny insects are now very busy reproducing- check down in the growing point, which is where they do the most damage. Control in the early part of the season is important. **Really:** go out there and check to see what’s going on: they are often overlooked until damage on fully expanded leaves is observed. You want your onion leaves to be big, green and tall right now as bulbing is initiated.

**European corn borer eggs found on Dahlias on Thursday.** Presence of eggs that are near hatching means that peak flight of the early moths is over. (ECB overwinters as late instar larvae, then they pupate and moths emerge in late May to mate and lay eggs). Trap catches throughout the Northeast have been low. One set of traps in Little Compton had zero, and traps in Seekonk and Swansea had zero and four, respectively.

*Pictures of eggs of various ages: blackhead stage (right) is just prior to hatch; when first laid, they resemble mother-of-pearl fish scales.*

Because ECB feeds out in the open on foliage for only a few days before boring into stems, there is a very short window to control them, unless you are using a B.t. hybrid sweetcorn. B.t. hybrids are in widespread use in silage corn, and it is thought that ECB population have decreased dramatically in the last decade because of this. On very high value crops like dahlias, though, economic losses can be significant. Eggs are just about to start hatching. A few sprays of B.t. kurstaki or B.t. aizawai, about 5 days apart, starting at egg hatch can be effective. Remember that unlike knockdown insecticides, larvae have to eat treated leaves.

**Finally:** These twin sisters, Edie and Vicky, have been farming with their brother, Jack, for over 70 years at the Berry Patch on the Richmond/South Kingstown borderline. The three of them are out there every day, hand setting transplants, tractor driving, hoeing, hand weeding, and best of all, greeting happy strawberry pickers. Here, Vicky is proudly displaying a new Dutch variety, ‘Sonata’, which they planted last year and is now producing beautiful berries.