

Dwarf tomato becoming popular plant

UNIVERSITY PARK — Dwarf tomatoes are becoming one of the most popular plants for home gardeners—offering fruit and ornamental value both indoors and out, Says John W. White of the Department of Horticulture at Penn State.

Dr. White has studied dwarf tomatoes as food-producing potted plants over several years at University Park. He said the key ingredients are sufficient sunlight and warmth, a proper container and good soil, adequate moisture, and fertilizer.

"For many hobby gardeners, success with dwarf tomatoes has come with new varieties, prepackaged soil mixes, peat and plastic pots, time-release fertilizers, and lighting fixtures," Dr. White commented.

He noted that several

New 4-H program started in Berks Co.

LEESPORT — More than 20 Berks County teenagers will participate in a new 4-H public affairs leadership program beginning today, April 22, 1978, at the Berks County agricultural center. The all-day Saturday session will be the first in a series of three public affairs workshops sponsored by the Berks County Cooperative Extension Service of Penn State University. The overall goals of the program are to teach a process of group leadership, to develop an awareness of community services and operations, and to motivate participants to become future community leaders.

Participants representing all areas of the county will spend the Saturday morning session learning leadership skills. The afternoon will be devoted to community and local government operations including a simulation exercise entitled "Our Town."

The 4-H public affairs leadership program for older Berks County teenagers is the pilot program in the state. If the project is successful in Berks County, it will become the model for similar programs throughout Pennsylvania.

Farm brings \$5200 per acre

NEW HOLLAND — A 40-acre farm with a milking parlor and tobacco shed was sold here Thursday for \$208,000 or \$5,200 per acre.

The farm is one block north of Route 23 and borders on North Kinzers Avenue and East Bruce Road.

It was sold by John E. and Mildred M. Campbell to John Z. Lapp of New Holland.

Auctioneers were Robert E. Martin of New Holland R3 and Frank L. Steller of Leola.

dwarf tomato varieties are suited to containers. These include ones such as Sugar Lump, Patio, Pixie Hybrid, Lollipop, Small Fry, and Tiny Tim. Depending on the variety, mature dwarf tomato plants range in height from 12 inches for Tiny Tim to three feet for Sugar Lump and Small Fry. The others are in between.

The best ornamental effects in hanging baskets, as well as good yields, are possible with varieties such as Yellow Pear, Sub-Arctic Cherry, and Toy Boy.

A dwarf tomato plant, he said, needs the soil volume of at least a half-gallon milk carton, a two pound coffee can lined with plastic, or a half-gallon plastic bleach container. All containers need some type of drainage

for excess water to run off. If a container does not have drainage holes, punch holes in the bottom and put a one-half inch layer of small stones or gravel in the bottom.

In most cases, the best soil is a top-grade, name-brand potting mix, Dr. White suggested. As next best, he recommended a mix of equal parts of coarse builder's sand, peat, and vermiculite—with a pinch of slow-release fertilizer added.

Drawf tomatoes should be started in shallow containers such as egg cartons and then be transplanted to the half-gallon containers mentioned earlier, after the first true leaves appear.

Watering of the seeds and tiny seedlings should be done from a saucer or basin, using

warm water. The water should move up through the drain holes to saturate the soil. If commercial potting mixes are difficult to wet, add two drops of liquid dishwashing detergent per quart of water. The detergent makes the water "wetter," he explained.

Like all tomatoes, dwarf plants need plenty of sunlight. This generally makes a southern window the best location for tomatoes grown indoors. If the plants are tall and spindly, they are not getting enough light. A florescent lamp of cool-white 40 watts, located about eight inches above the plants, can substitute for sunlight over a 12 to 18 hour day.

"A well-prepared soil mix contains the fertilizers that

plants need for the first three or four weeks of growth. Then nitrogen and potassium should be added, either with water each week as a time-release pellet or as an organic fertilizer. Follow the instructions on the container," he advised.

"If the leaves become smaller and lighter green as a plant ages, then nitrogen is lacking. On the other hand, if a plant wilts when the soil is moist, too much fertilizer may have been added."

The most important step in watering full grown drawf tomato plants, he declared, is to add enough water at the top for some to run through the bottom of the container. The excess water keeps unused fertilizer salts from accumulating in the soil. If a mold or green slime

develops on the soil surface, it is being kept too wet. If the plants wilt or the soil shrinks away from the sides of the container, the soil is too dry. Where soot or dirt accumulate on the leaf surfaces, the leaves can be sprayed occasionally with lukewarm water.

As for insects and diseases on dwarf tomato plants grown indoors, check pesticides recommended for tender ornamental plants for suggested use on tomatoes. Where dwarf plants are grown indoors, one should apply standard pesticides. All instructions on pesticide labels should be followed carefully. A four page leaflet, "Growing Tomatoes and Eggplant in Home Gardens," is available from county offices of the Cooperative Extension Service or from the Mailing Room, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, Pa. 16802.

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