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Research supported, education flourishes in Tyson greenhouses



By KATHLEEN THEAL
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

A research facility, a florist shop, a classroom and a dormitory do not seem to be related, yet they can all be found in the greenhouse system behind Tyson Building — each an integral part of the whole.

Mark Shedlovsky, greenhouse supervisor, said research is the primary mission of the greenhouses.

"A lot of breeding research is going on here, with plants such as geraniums, African violets and exacum," Shedlovsky said. "Dr. Richard Craig does a lot of research and breeding with seed geraniums in the first greenhouse behind Tyson."

Craig, associate professor of plant breeding, has been working with geranium breeding research since he was an undergraduate at the University. He was instrumental in introducing the first seed-propagated geranium in 1960.

"Now, we're researching seed-propagated, tetraploid geraniums (those with double the normal number of chromosomes), Craig said. "They have heavier, thicker flowers that slow growth — very desirable traits to have."

Research is also being done with energy conservation,

Shedlovsky said.

"We're using different types of glazing materials on the greenhouses to see how they affect energy demands and the amount of light that enters," Shedlovsky said. "We've also been growing cool temperature crops — flowering plants that require lower energy demands — so more fuel can be conserved."

Shedlovsky said they grow major seasonal crops that can be sold as cut flowers and plants in the sales area of the greenhouses.

"But we don't make production fit the season because we don't want to screw up the research," he said. "Sales are incidental to research, although we try to dispose of a lot of our research material through sales to recover some expenses."

The sales area has a large clientele, Shedlovsky said, even though the greenhouses do not advertise.

"We get our clientele by word of mouth," he said. "The biggest buyers are students and faculty, but we also attract some people from downtown. We also do consulting on sick plants if people bring them in."

Wendy McCarren (10th-agriculture) said, "I've bought some nice plants there that were in good condition and reasonably priced."

Other than the sales area, some space is reserved for

classroom work, Shedlovsky said.

"Last Fall Term, a class grew a crop of mums. Winter Term, greenhouse crop management was taught — Spring Term, a class on plant environment was offered," he said.

Terry Underkofler (10th-horticulture) said, "I took Hort 435, greenhouse crop management, and we worked with different crops that could be sold. It was a good course. I got a lot of experience."

Jim Dostal (11th-horticulture) gets experience seven days a week by actually living in the headhouses located in front of the greenhouses.

"I've lived there 11 terms, the longest anyone has lived in the headhouse," he said. "I'm there for the experience — you learn a lot."

In exchange for a free room, Dostal and another student, Guy Metzler, must make 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. security checks each night and alternate watering everything on weekends.

"It takes about four to five hours an afternoon on a sunny day," Dostal said. "We also have to maintain everything. Sometimes we have to get up in the middle of the night and fix the temperature if it gets too cold. It's a full-time job."

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