Research improves tomato

MANHATTAN-Old-fashioned, "heirloom" varieties may be losing their edge as the best-tasting tomatoes available. Flavorful new varieties are now entering the

Compared to their heirloom kin, these just-released, modern varieties are also easier to grow, said horticulturist Ward Upham at Kansas State University. Yes, their fruit has been flavor-enhanced. But, the plants themselves are disease-resistant, more productive and compact.

These new varieties include Mountain Glory, Red Defender, Scarlet Red, and SecuriTY 28.

"I have yet to see any seed packets for these varieties advertised on the home gardener market. But, the seed is available this year to U.S. commercial growers..." Upham said.

The varieties' taste improvements trace back to the 1990s, when U.S. Department of Agriculture tomato researcher Ronald Buttery led a team who found something new in the natural chemicals that give tomatoes taste.

The chemical compound that the team extracted had been overlooked until then because it dissolves in water – including tomato juices. Called furaneol (fur-ANNee-uhl), the compound was present in various amounts but proved to be highest in tomatoes known to be better tasting.

"That really caught tomato breeders' attention," Upham said. "Soon, some of them had identified the gene that controls the level of furaneol and incorporated it into their breeding programs. We're now seeing the fruit - pun intended - of their research."

A modern variety named Fabulous wasn't part of this breeding program, he added. Yet, it naturally has higher than average levels of furaneol. "And, Fabulous has been around long enough that seed may be available to home gardeners who would prefer to grow their own 2009 tomatoes from seed," the horticulturist said.

'Bugz' life is hard



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press Brielle Bange, a first grader in Krysti Terrell's class at Colby Grade School, plays the role of a stink bug in the first-grade musical "Bugz," which will be presented at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. Monday in the school auditorium. The little stink bug stands dejectedly to show how badly she feels, because in the song, nobody likes her. Grade school music director is Mrs. Koel. Brielle is the daughter of Paul and Tawnia Bange.



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entries will be judged based on literary merit.

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