

Students Grow Flying Sauce

Jim Wilkes, Science Reporter

TORONTO - In the cult movie classic Attack of the Killer Tomatoes, mutant vegetables cut a deadly swath through the community, consuming everyone in their path.

But Canadian astronaut Bob Thirsk says Toronto students cultivating tomato seeds from space shouldn't worry about like imitating art.

"There should be no fear on the part of teachers or parents about any toxic fruit growing from these tomato plants," said Thirsk, who flew aboard the shuttle Columbia on a 17-day mission in 1996.

He said he'll eat tomatoes produced from the high-flying seeds or use them to make salsa or ketchup.

Thirsk visited students at St. Cecilia Catholic School on Annette St. yesterday to check up on their experiments with tomato seeds taken into space by astronaut Mark Garneau.

The Tomatosphere project involves 2,500 secondary school classrooms across Canada growing 400,000 seeds, half of which made the trip to space. Space plants are said to grow faster and taller.

"The space-flown seeds made 170 orbits of the Earth, travelled more than 7 million kilometers and spent 12 days weightless," Thirsk said.

At the end of June, schools will send results of their experiment to the Canadian Space Agency which will compile the data and make conclusions.