

Nature Note

Tomato

► **TOMATOES** are botanically members of the deadly nightshade family, Solanaceae, and for many centuries were considered poisonous.

Today tomatoes are a major crop in the United States and are used most everywhere in the form of juice, salad, catchup, paste and sauce. Just recently, tomato juice was designated the official drink of Ohio.

The nightshade family includes plants that have a special pungent smell when crushed, with star-shaped flowers and many-seeded round fruits. The plants are often narcotic and extremely poisonous, but sometimes harmless and edible. The potato, tomato, tobacco and petunia are all members of this same family.

Like the potato, the tomato, *Lycopersicon esculentum*, originated in South America in an area now known as Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. Here it was cultivated by the ancient Indians, and about 2,000 years ago was carried into Central America and Mexico. The Aztec Indians gave it the name *tomatl*. When early explorers from Europe discovered Central America, they then carried tomato plants, with many other treasures, to their own countries. Here many people considered the tomato poisonous, and it was grown for many years as a decorative plant. About mid-16th century, Italians may have been the first Europeans to eat the tomato, and by the 18th century, it was well accepted in Italian cooking. So back again across the Atlantic Ocean came the tomato in the form of sauces and stews, and gradually the tomato plant became accepted—although many people still hesitated to eat the fruit until about 1820.

Although the edible tomato berry is botanically a fruit, a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1893 labels it a vegetable for purposes of trade.

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ZOOLOGY

Angora Mouse Joins Cats, Goats and Rabbits

► **AN ANGORA MOUSE** has joined the long-haired cats, goats and rabbits named for the Turkish city now called Ankara.

The sport, or mutation, appeared among hundreds of thousands of inbred mice in the famous Jackson Laboratory mouse factory in Bar Harbor, Maine.

Dr. Margaret Dickie, who discovered the Angora mouse, says she wonders why it did not appear earlier because it already had appeared in so many other species. It is a recessive, or hidden, mutation.

Unlike Funnyfoot, the mouse with muscular dystrophy that appeared in the laboratory in 1950, Angora is not being used for research work other than linkage tests to show the relationship of genes.

It is important scientifically that the Angora mouse did appear as a mutation.

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GEOLOGY

Seawater in Lakes Trapped Centuries Ago

► **LARGE AREAS** of Norway are believed to have been flooded by the sea about 10,000 years ago, after the last great glacier disappeared.

This conclusion is drawn from recent discoveries of salt water in the bottom layers of two Norwegian lakes. Writing in *Nature*, 207:156, 1965, Dr. Hans Holtan, Norwegian Institute for Water Research, concluded that the salt water "originated from seawater left behind after the last glacial period."

The lakes are Tronstadvatn and Birke-landsvatn in southwestern Norway. The former is about seven miles from the coast and is about 323 feet deep. The latter is about 22 miles inland with a depth of about 227 feet.

Dr. Holtan's calculations indicate that the present sea level in the area is about 132 feet lower than it was during the last stage of the glacial epoch.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Asthma Seen a Syndrome Instead of Disease

► **THE CAUSES** of asthma, long believed to be psychosomatic—related to the mind as well as to the body—are to be studied in New York under the direction of a psychiatrist with a \$700,000 grant.

The grant is from the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md., and is expected to cover seven years. Dr. Marvin Stein, professor of psychiatry at Cornell University Medical College, who has been studying psychophysiological factors in asthma 10 years, will direct a research team that will use a many-sided approach. Since a variety of causes have been found to start asthmatic attacks, he regards asthma as a syndrome, or combination of symptoms rather than as a disease.

Both human beings and animals will be studied from physiological, endocrinological, immunochemical, and neurophysiological as well as psychophysiological angles.

When asthma occurs at night, for example, is it because of an antigen or allergen, or is it because the person is dreaming? The Cornell group will work with both apparently healthy and asthmatic persons, taking electroencephalograms or brain waves, measuring heart rates, respiration and perspiration during sleep.

One research team will study the effect of the central nervous system on experimental asthma and oversusceptibility in the guinea pig. They will create stressful situations, including cold and high intensity sound as well as the stress produced by the development of a conditioned fear response.

Asthmatic patients undergoing psychotherapy will also be studied. The therapy sessions of some of them will be tape recorded, while at the same time, their respiration, heart rate and amounts of perspiration will be measured.

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