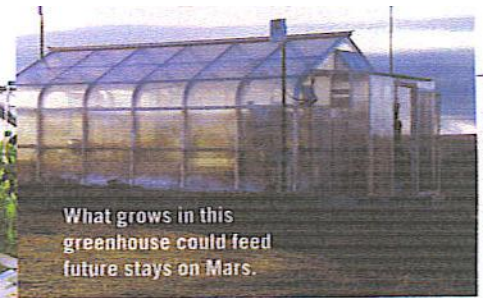


dig it!



What grows in this greenhouse could feed future stays on Mars.

green space

PLANT LIFE ON MARS

Gardening on Mars sounds like a sci-fi movie, but scientists on Devon Island in Canada's high Arctic have been proving that it's not such a far-fetched concept. Since 2002, they have been growing vegetables in a unique greenhouse in a landscape that mimics the very cold and extreme one on Mars, in hopes of someday transplanting their research to space living. Eventual crops for Mars might include sugar beets and

wheat, says Dr. Alain Berinstain, of the Canadian Space Agency and principal investigator of the Arthur Clarke Mars Greenhouse project at the Haughton-Mars Project Research Station.

The greenhouse operates through computerized light and temperature-detecting sensors, and daily images are transmitted via satellite to the researchers who spend six to eight weeks at the site in summer. As spring arrives, the automated systems start delivering nutrients to the plants, all grown from seed. After the first three years, lettuce, cucumber, radishes and zinnias were flourishing and the scientists enjoyed their first home-grown salads.

The project could well have spin-off benefits for earth-bound gardeners—from shade-tolerant tomatoes to advanced greenhouse technology. To learn more, visit space.gc.ca/asc/eng/sciences/devon.asp and marsonearth.org.—HEATHER KENT