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# Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

plant scientists and  
home economists of the  
U. S. Department of  
Agriculture

Why moss on lawn?  
Coal ashes for fertilizer?  
Gather gourds before frost?  
Spice in fruit butter

--ooOoo--

Once again the mailbag is full of letters--and the letters are full of questions on many different subjects. Let's start first with some questions about lawns and gardens.

First, here's a question about leaves on the lawn. The letter says: "The other day when I started raking the leaves off my lawn, my neighbor told me I should leave the leaves to protect the grass in winter. Please tell me whether leaves are helpful in protecting grass."

Scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture disagree with your neighbor. They say leaves from trees should be removed from the lawn because they are likely to injure the grass by smothering it, especially if they are thick enough to hide the grass. Leaves contain very little available plant food. They are practically worthless as a fertilizer for grass unless they are composted until they are completely decayed. The idea that leaves form a protective covering for grass is a mistake, the scientists say. If the grass in your lawn is adapted to the region where you live, it will not need protection either in winter or summer.

Here's another question about the lawn: "Please tell me why moss has started to grow on our lawn. I have been told that this is because the soil is acid."

Answer: Moss usually indicates either that the soil is poor, or the drainage poor, or that there is too much shade. Moss does not necessarily indicate an acid soil. It often grows even where lime has been used abundantly. Liberal fertilizing

THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

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to build up a weak growth of grass will often do away with moss. The grass will increase in vigor and drive the moss out with its own growth.

Question No. 3 about lawns is this: "Where can I get full information about caring for my lawn this fall?"

The answer is: You can get full information about your lawn in a bulletin published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Send a postcard to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. and ask for the bulletin called "Planting and Care of Lawns," No. 1677. As long as the free supply holds out, a copy is yours for the asking.

From questions about lawns let's go on to a question about the garden. Here's the question: "Are coal ashes useful as fertilizer for a home garden?"

Plant scientists say: No, coal ashes have little value as a fertilizer, but when they are sifted and mixed with a heavy clay soil they help make the soil loose and better for growing things. Wood ashes, on the other hand, contain from 5 to 10 percent of potash. If you start coal fires with wood, the wood ashes in the mixture, of course, add to the value of the coal ashes.

Now here's an inquiry about the time to gather gourds this fall. A home-maker says: "We are hoping to use the gourds on our vine for handicraft work this winter. Please tell me whether to gather them before or after the frost."

The answer comes from a bulletin from the U. S. Department of Agriculture called "Useful and Ornamental Gourds." The bulletin says: Thin-shelled gourds of the dipper type may be gathered before a frost, if you want them to have a tan or mahogany color, or gathered after the vines are killed by frost if you want them to have a curly-maple appearance. Never subject gourds to hard freezing. Gourds of the thick-fleshed type must be gathered before the first frost. But their rinds should be hard, and the stems should have started to shrivel before they are picked. Gourds of this type are more difficult to cure than the thin-shelled ones. After



a few months they usually begin to fade. Thin-shelled gourds are mature and ready for picking when the green color changes to a light brown; the shells begin to harden; the gourds become lighter in weight; and the tendrils on the vines near the gourds shrivel and dry.

Anyone wanting further information on growing, gathering or curing gourds is welcome to the gourd bulletin. Write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. and ask for "Useful and Ornamental Gourds." Farmers' Bulletin No. 1849. As long as the free supply lasts, a postcard will bring you that bulletin.

The last question comes from a lady who is making fruit butter. She asks: "How much spice should I add to apple or peach butter? My recipe doesn't say."

The answer is: The amount of spice you use depends partly on your taste. In general, 1 to 2 teaspoons of mixed ground spices is about right for a gallon of fruit butter. Use only fresh spice, and use just enough to give a delicate flavor without covering up the natural flavor of the fruit.

That's all the questions for today. More on Thursday.

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