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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Thursday, July 27, 1944.

QUESTION BOX:

ANSWERS FROM:

How fight mildew?
How control summer household
insects?

Scientists of the U.S. Department
of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

Housekeeping isn't easy in summertime, aside from enduring the heat and the humidity. Today we have some questions on problems caused by hot, damp, weather, answered by various scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The first is on mildew---the next on summerhousehold insect pests. Let's start with the one about mildew.

"How can I prevent mildew during hot, damp weather? And if I find mildew spots on anything, how can I take them out?"

As you know, mildew is a fungus that grows on fabrics, leather, wood, paper and many other materials in moist, warm, dark places. Home economists say that to prevent mildew, first do all you can to avoid conditions that cause it. Air and light, ventilation and sunny rooms help a great deal in keeping mildew away. Mildew strikes first in the places you forget about---down cellar---or in clothing closets ---on shower curtains---in damp clothes rolled up for ironing---in far corners of bureau drawers.

So the first rule for preventing mildew is to keep the house as dry and well-aired as possible. If you are having a spell of humid hot weather, turning on an electric fan helps, especially directing the current of air into closets. Or set an ordinary electric light in the closet for a while to dry off the walls. Another way of keeping a closet dry is to have an open jar of calcium chloride standing in it to absorb moisture. You have to renew this jar when the solid chemical turns to liquid. In a damp cellar crocks or jars half filled with unslaked lime will absorb

moisture and help prevent mildew.

Mildew attacks soiled fabrics more readily than clean fabrics. Wash shower curtains of canvas or duck frequently with soap and water and dry them thoroughly before you hang them up again. After using a shower, spread the curtain out to dry. Curtains left bunched together after a bath may mildew in a few hours in summer time. You can make a shower curtain mildew proof this way: Soak it for 20 minutes in enough hot soapy water to cover it. Make a solution of cadmium chloride in hot water, using 3 ounces of cadmium chloride crystals for each gallon of water. Squeeze the shower curtains out of the soapsuds and put it directly into the hot solution of cadmium chloride so that the solution covers the curtain well. Keep it hot for half an hour. Then wring the curtain out without rinsing, and dry on a rope clothesline. Never use a metal line for this. Curtains treated this way will withstand weather and washing and will still resist mildew attack.

Now about taking out mildew spots. Work on them promptly. If you don't, the fungus growth may go down into the fibers of the material. Fresh mildew stains will often come out if you simply wash the material with soap and water and then put it out in the bright sunshine. If this doesn't work, try covering the spots with lemon juice and salt, and placing the garment or article in the sun.

Old, stubborn mildew spots are sometimes impossible to remove without damaging the material. You can use sodium perborate as a bleach on white or color fast fabrics. Test for color fastness on a corner that doesn't show. Use 4 tablespoons of sodium perborate to each pint of soapy water. You can soak a garment as long as half an hour in this bleaching solution. Or, as another method, you can dampen the mildew stain with water and sprinkle sodium perborate powder right on the stain. However you use this bleach, be sure to rinse the material thoroughly afterward, and dry in the sun.

Next we have a question on some annoying insect pests- This homemaker says:

"We have been troubled by two annoying insects lately. I found some little

black bugs in a box of cereal, and at times black ants come into my kitchen in great numbers. How can I get rid of them?"

After you open a package of flour, rice, cornmeal, or any other cereal, the entomologists say it's liable to become infested with cereal beetles or weevils. In fact, if insect eggs were accidentally packed with the cereal, weevils might develop inside the package while it's still sealed.

So put all packaged cereals into clean metal or glass containers with tight lids immediately after you open the package. Do the same if you buy cereals in bulk or have any home-grown meal or whole-wheat cereals. This reduces the chance of weevil infestation. Look carefully at the paper bags in which flour is sold.

Scald out any cannisters you intend to use for cereals, especially if you have already kept cereals in them. Burn or feed to poultry any cereal you find infested, and sterilize the container by boiling it before you use it again. Also go over the pantry shelves with a stiff brush dipped in hot soapy water to remove any old crumbs of cereal, flour or bread that may be lodged out of sight, or any dust or lint that might harbor insect eggs.

Don't keep much cereal on hand in hot weather. If you have some unopened packages, you can treat them with dry heat just as they are. Put them in the oven with the temperature at 150 degrees for 20 minutes. You can also heat-treat beans, whole grains, nut meats, dried peppers and other dried foods that attract insects by spreading the beans in a shallow pan and putting them in an oven at 150 degrees for 20 minutes.

Now about ants. The secret of getting rid of ants is to locate the nest and destroy the queen and young ants. Follow the trail of the ants back to where they disappear. Try to inject a little carbon disulphide, kerosene or gasoline into the opening with an oil-can or small syringe. These materials are inflammable--- so don't smoke or have any fire nearby while you use them.

If you can't find the ant colony, try poisoned sirup as bait. Or sprinkle sodium fluoride powder along the edges of the kitchen floor. And of course, sweep up all crumbs promptly and keep your food supplies in tight containers. If you've had trouble with ants getting on cakes and other foods before you could put them away, there's an old-fashioned way of protecting your kitchen table when you want to use it for cooling foods. Stand the table legs in small saucers or jars containing a little kerosene. Keep the surface clear of dead ants or the live ones will use them as a bridge to get over and crawl up the table legs.

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