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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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QUESTION BOX

How use sour milk for sweet?
Substitute corn sirup for
white sugar?
Replace butter with other
fat in cookie recipe?
Oatmeal or soybean flour in
biscuits?

ANSWERS FROM

food specialists of the
U. S. D. A.

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It's a wise cook who knows how to use one food to replace another in cooking --who knows not only how but when to substitute one ingredient for another the recipe calls for. It's a wise cook who knows how to use up sour milk in a sweet-milk recipe, or how to use a less expensive fat for butter, or sirup when the book says sugar.

You see, if you know the secrets of substituting--what the old, colored cook called "switchin' an' swappin' the fixin's"--then you can make the most of the foods you have on hand; you can cook more economically; and you're better prepared for the emergency when you find yourself caught short on some food. (Does this sound familiar---"Me, oh, my! I'm clear out of baking powder, and company coming in half an hour!")

The reason for all this conversation about "switchin' the fixin's" is that the mailbag this week has brought in several letters from housewives on the subject.

One letter contains an old familiar question: How use sour milk in a recipe that calls for sweet milk?

Here's the general rule for substituting clabbered--that is, thick sour milk and soda for sweet milk and baking powder: Use the same amount of sour milk and add half a teaspoon of soda for each cup of sour milk. In a thin mixture like pancake batter, omit the baking powder called for in the recipe; in a thick mixture like

biscuit dough, reduce the baking powder one half.

By the way, modern scientific cooks always add soda with the flour and other dry ingredients instead of putting it directly in the sour milk. The reason? Well, as soon as soda and sour milk get together, the gas begins to escape, and you lose part of what makes the bread or cake light before you even get the ingredients together.

Now for Question No. 2: "Could I use corn sirup instead of white sugar in making cake or cookies?"

Cookery scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say: Yes, you can use corn sirup in place of refined white sugar, if you remember that the sirup contains water while sugar is dry, so you need to cut down on some of the liquid in the recipe. Of course, cakes or cookies won't taste exactly the same made with sirup as with sugar. Cookies made with corn or cane sirup won't be as sweet as sugar cookies, for example.

Here's your rule for substituting corn, or cane, or maple sirup for white refined sugar in a recipe for cake, or cookies: Replace the sugar with sirup, measure for measure. Then reduce the liquid the recipe calls for just one-third. In other words, use the same measure of sirup as sugar, but use only two-thirds as much milk or other liquid as in the recipe.

This rule holds good, also, when you are substituting cane sirup or maple sirup for sugar. Just use the same amount of cane or maple sirup as sugar but use one-third less liquid in the recipe. Maple sirup, of course, will give your cake and cookies a maple flavor.

Now here's a question about substituting fats in a recipe. A housewife says: "I have a cookie recipe that calls for a good deal of butter. I wonder if I could use lard or some less expensive fat in place of so much butter."

Cooking scientists say: Yes, a mild-flavored lard or almost any other

milk-flavored edible fat is satisfactory in baked products. In general, lard has greater shortening power than the other ordinary cooking fats.

When you're substituting one fat for another in a recipe, your first impulse may be to use measure for measure. But that doesn't always work, because the amount of actual fat in a cupful is not the same for all fats. Some fats, like butter and oleomargarine, contain water. Other fats, such as the hydrogenated cooking fats, have been whipped up with a harmless inert gas to make them white and light. So now, if you substitute lard or some solid fat for butter in your recipe, use only seven-eighths of a cup of lard for each cup of butter the recipe calls for. Or do it this way: Measure a full even cup of lard and then take out 2 tablespoons of it. That will leave seven-eighths cup.

If you are using one of the hydrogenated fats (which aren't solid because gas has been whipped into them) you can use the same amount of fat as butter--or just a shade less.

Now for the last question, this one about different kinds of flour for biscuits. A housewife asks: "Can I use oatmeal or soybean flour instead of white flour in my recipe for baking powder biscuits?"

Cooking specialists say you can substitute oatmeal or soybean flour for part of the white flour your recipe calls for, but not for all. Wheat flour contains gluten which is necessary for a light texture in your biscuits. So you need to use at least half wheat flour with any other flour, except perhaps rye, if you want light instead of heavy biscuits.

And that concludes today's batch of questions.

