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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, December 5, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Questions and Answers." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, the Bureau of Plant Industry, and other bureaus of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

As usual, the mailbag is overflowing this morning. All these questions coming in day after day -- they keep Aunt Sammy on the jump, just trying to catch up with them. No need for her to take reducing exercises. She keeps in training running all around this big Department of Agriculture, visiting the specialists and getting their helpful scientific answers to your questions.

Well, the first question today is: "What makes sauerkraut grow soft?" That's a depressing question. Spoilage is the answer. Sauerkraut ought not to become soft if you make and keep it properly. Spoilage means a waste of good food. Several things may cause spoilage in sauerkraut. First, the kraut may contain too little lactic acid to preserve it. Or, you may not have enough juice to cover the kraut and keep it from being exposed to the air. Or, third, you may have kept your kraut at too warm a temperature after the fermentation has been completed. If you use good, firm cabbage, and if you ferment it at room temperature, having a salt concentration of about two and a half per cent, and then, if you store it in a cool place, the sauerkraut specialists say you should never have trouble with softening from spoilage.

The second question is about wild ducks. Fishermen sometimes have a grudge against wild ducks because they believe ducks sometimes ruin their favorite form of sport. Many people have the mistaken idea that all wild ducks live on fish. Others think that ducks live on bugs. As a matter of fact, the Bureau of Biological Survey says that wild ducks are vegetarians. About ninety per cent of the food of wild ducks is vegetation, growing in or near the water. Less than one-tenth of the total food of ducks is animal matter, and this small part is chiefly mollusks, insects and crustaceans -- seldom fish. The only wild ducks that do not hold to this rule of a chiefly vegetarian diet are the ducks known as mergansers or fish ducks.

Well, now, the next time you see a duck standing on his head in shoal water, don't worry for fear it is fishing. It is sifting the soft mud bottom for fallen seeds and buried roots and tubers. If the duck dives, even though the water is more than ten feet deep, it isn't after fish, but is grubbing the sand or mud bottom for choice bits of vegetable food.

A New England lady has written in for advice on growing flowering bulbs indoors in winter. Well, we had a chat on indoor gardens back in October, but I'm glad to repeat a few of the suggestions of W.R.B., our garden advisor, on growing bulbs in bowls. He says the paper white narcissus is the easiest bulb to force in the house. All you need for growing it is a shallow bowl for water and



some pebbles to hold the bulb in position. You can place six to ten rather large bulbs in one dish, or you can place the bulbs singly in the top of a narrow-necked vase, with the lower tip of the bulb just touching the water. When you first put bulbs in water, keep them in a cool place so the roots will form first. Then gradually bring them into a warmer place where they will get plenty of light. That will start the flowering. For the best results, don't put bulbs in a deep dish and don't cover them with water. They only need water around the base where the roots form. You can also grow hyacinths in this way. Lily-of-the-valley bulbs don't require soil either, but they grow in fiber or moss instead of in a bowl of water and pebbles.

You'll have best results if you select only the plump healthy bulbs. If you make plantings at two-week intervals, you can have a sequence of bloom from late fall until early spring.

Here's another letter. This one is from a mother who wants a recipe for making sugared popcorn. While she's getting a pencil to take down this short recipe, I'd like to mention that homemade popcorn sweets are some of the best for children, because they aren't too concentrated in sugar. Popcorn balls are old favorites for the Christmas tree. A simple sirup of sugar, water, vinegar and salt, boiled to the hard ball stage, and then flavored with vanilla makes an excellent popcorn-ball mixture. You can use this same sirup with some unsweetened chocolate to make chocolate popcorn balls. This sugared popcorn is another favorite for the youngsters. Here's the recipe:-- If you can't use it now, you may find it very handy around Christmas time. Just four ingredients:

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups of sugar
- 1 cup of water
- 1 teaspoon of salt, and
- 2 quarts of freshly popped corn.

I'll repeat those simple ingredients. (REPEAT)

First, cook the sugar, water and salt until the sirup forms a soft ball when you drop it into cold water, or until a candy thermometer registers 238 degrees F. Remove the sirup from the fire. Beat it with a spoon until it is creamy. Now drop in the popcorn. Stir it quickly until each kernel is coated with sugar. Put the sugared popcorn on a greased platter, being careful to separate the grains, so they won't stick together.

Somebody is sure to ask now what makes popcorn pop. I'll tell you how the experts explain it. They say that a steam explosion takes place inside each kernel. You see, each grain of corn contains a moist pulp inside the hard shell. When the moisture inside becomes hot, it turns to steam. As the steam can't escape through the shell it explodes, breaks the shell, and lets all the puffy white inside out. Corn will not pop when it is too dry or too moist, say the Cereal Specialists. Pop corn stored where it is in contact with the outside air will have the right amount of moisture for popping. If it is too moist exposure in a heated room will dry it out. If it is too dry, sprinkle it lightly with water and leave it in a tight container for a day or two until the moisture is absorbed. Corn pops best when the fire is hot enough to make it begin to pop in about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  minutes.

