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In 344
Housekeepers' Chats

Tuesday, January 6, 1931.

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Subject: Husbands and Vegetables. Approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture. Bulletins available: Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes.

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"What would you do, Aunt Sammy, if you had a husband who refused to eat vegetables?" asked my friend, the bride. She looked very grave indeed and I realized immediately that one of the tragedies of early married life had taken place in the house across the street.

Before I had time to answer, she continued, "When we were first married, Bill ate everything I set before him. He never complained about anything. If I burned the cornbread or put too much salt in the soup or let the custard curdle, he never minded a bit. No matter what happened he insisted that I was the best cook in the world. After awhile, though, he stopped eating his vegetables. When I asked him what the trouble was or if they were not cooked to suit him, he would just say that he guessed he wasn't very hungry. I couldn't understand how he could leave such good vegetables as carrots, cabbage and spinach on his plate. Finally last night the worst happened. It was awful, Aunt Sammy. You have no idea. We had baked squash and Bill refused to touch any. He said that as we had been married almost six months he thought he could now be frank without hurting my feelings and tell me that he didn't like vegetables, that he always had disliked them and that he didn't intend to eat any more. Wasn't that terrible? All out of a clear sky, too.

"Aunt Sammy, I almost cried, but Bill paid no attention, just went on talking. He said his mother had stuffed squash and spinach down his throat from his earliest years and that one of the joys of leaving home was escaping the disagreement over vegetables. After that, Aunt Sammy, he announced in the most severe voice he has ever used around me that marriage was not going to drag him back to eating foods he disliked. Meat, potatoes, and dessert was a good enough menu for him."

The bride looked almost tearful. "Sometimes I think I've made a complete failure of my marriage. Who would ever have guessed that the nicest husband in the world would have a prejudice against vegetables? Why, up until today I thought he was perfect. I really did. I never dreamed that he had such ideas in his head all the time. Think of going around hating squash and never touching asparagus if you could help it."

"Few husbands are perfect in this imperfect world," I said trying to be soothing. "I can think of many worse faults than the one yours has and--"

"But, Aunt Sammy, I'm afraid you don't realize how serious this is. How can there be harmony in our home when I am longing for peas and onions and Bill cares only for beefsteak and bread? Can you imagine me sitting at the table beside my husband and eating Brussels sprouts alone? Oh, no, Aunt Sammy."

I agreed that something should be done.

"And there's the matter of Bill's health. He needs those vegetables to keep him feeling well and to make him pleasant and good-natured."

"Have you tried persuasion?"

"I've tried everything. I've talked about the values of vegetables for hours at a time. I've told him about the minerals and vitamins they contain, the iron, the calcium and---"

"And what does he say?"

"He says, 'Pooh' and 'Nonsense, I'll eat what I like and nothing else'."

"What else have you tried?"

"I've tried begging. I've said, 'Bill, please eat those string beans for my sake.' But it doesn't work any more. He just shakes his head and looks bored. What would you do now?"

"My remedy would be tact, patience, and good cooking, especially the last. First, I would never mention vegetables. I would never urge. Perhaps your husband finds urging irritating. Some husbands do. Then I would prepare and serve vegetables to perfection. That's a real art. I would bring them on the table looking so tempting and delicious that even a very stubborn man could scarcely resist them. I would serve them without a word or even one fond look in their direction, acting perfectly indifferent as to whether they are eaten or not. Now and then your husband, I'm sure, will try a little of that beautiful snowy cauliflower with cheese or those fresh green peas. And they will taste so good that he will want a little more. With tact and patience a good cook can usually win the day."

The bride's face brightened.

"You do think of the best plans, Aunt Sammy. It never occurred to me that there was an art in preparing vegetables. I always thought you just put them in water and cooked them and that was all."

"The prejudice against vegetables often is the result of poor cooking and careless serving. You can see yourself how it works. When a mass of grey looking cabbage, a dish of watery spinach cooked until it has lost its natural green and turned brown, or a bowl of pale insipid beets come on the table, it tempts no one's appetite."

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"How can the attractive color in vegetables be kept when they are cooked? My spinach and other green vegetables always turn brown and I'm afraid my cabbage and cauliflower grow dark too."

"Overcooking is responsible for a lot of damage to the best of vegetables. The rule to remember is: Cook until just tender and serve immediately. The colors in vegetables are due to chemical compounds which are influenced by acid, alkali, and heat."

"To preserve the green color in vegetables cook them in an uncovered kettle for as short a time as possible. The volatile acid in the vegetable which might affect the color escapes with the steam, when there is no cover to hold it in."

"And what about red color in beets and red cabbage?"

"Here again use a small amount of water, and add a little vinegar or lemon juice just before the vegetable is ready to serve. The acid will bring back the pretty red color. With white and yellow vegetables the rule of cooking only until tender holds quite as true as with the green and red."

"Then how do you cook cauliflower and turnips and other strong vegetables for the best flavor, Aunt Sammy?"

"Here again cook as short a time as possible and be a little more liberal with the water." Overcooking develops those undesirable compounds responsible for the many traditional, often unkind, remarks about cabbage."

"I know. Bill calls cabbage 'boarding-house food'."

"Never mind. I prophesy that if you carry this campaign out according to plans, he will be calling for more vegetables with the best of them. While we're at it, let me suggest that the best method of cooking vegetables to preserve the nutritive value is baking in the skin. Steaming, pressure cooking, boiling whole in small amounts of water are other methods of preserving nutrients, but they must be suited to the type of vegetable you are preparing."

"If our plan works, Aunt Sammy, I shall make a will and remember you in the first paragraph. It will read, 'And I will and bequeath my best silver necklace and countless other valuable possessions to my friend, Aunt Sammy, who brought peace and good will and vegetables to our dinner table.'"

Wednesday: The Child's Own Corner.

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