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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE



September 19, 1942

QUESTION BOX

How prevent curdling of milk on scalloped potatoes?
Sirup for candying sweetpotatoes?
How store pumpkin and squash?
Safe keeping for dried food?
Ashes for gardens?

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

INFORMATION FROM

scientists of the U. S.
Department of Agriculture

More food questions are waiting for answer today, and a garden question along with them.

Let's begin with the food questions. Here's one about that favorite American dish--scalloped potatoes. The question is: "Is there any way to keep milk on scalloped potatoes from curdling?"

The food scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture suggest: Use very fresh milk and keep the oven heat low when you bake the scalloped potatoes.

Here's a question about a favorite sweetpotato dish--candied sweetpotatoes.

A housewife says: "Is it possible to use corn sirup or honey in place of sugar in making candied sweetpotatoes?"

The food scientists say: Yes. Here's how: Boil medium-sized sweetpotatoes in their skins. When they are tender, drain, peel, and cut them in halves or slices. Make a layer of the sweetpotatoes over the bottom of a greased baking pan. Dot with fat. Sprinkle with salt. Pour over the potatoes a cup of corn sirup or a cup of honey. Then bake in a moderate oven.

Or.....to save heating up the oven just for one dish of sweetpotatoes.... cook them on top of the stove. Be sure to keep the heat low, and watch to see that the sirup doesn't scorch.

Now from these cooking questions, let's turn to a couple about storing food.

Here's a letter asking the best way to store pumpkin and winter squash to keep during the winter.

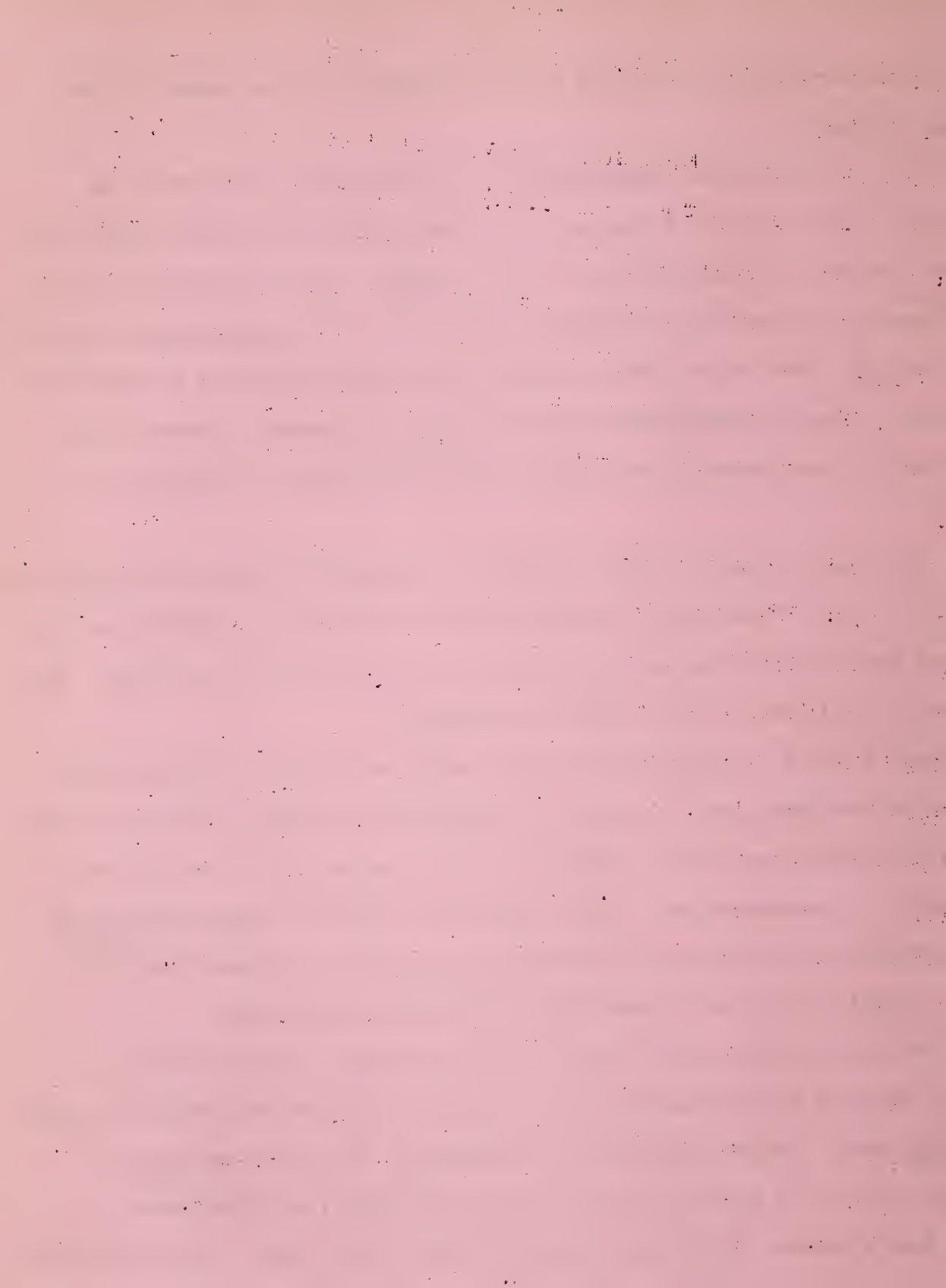
The bulletin called "Home Storage of Vegetables" (free from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.) says this about storing pumpkin and squash: Pumpkins and squashes may be kept for winter use in the storage room in the basement or in dry, well-ventilated cellars, but a dry, aboveground, frostproof place is best. Set them in rows on shelves so that they are not in contact with each other. Keep the temperature around 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Late-maturing varieties of these vegetables will keep at this temperature until late in the winter.

Now here's a letter reporting trouble in storing dried fruits and vegetables. The letter says: "Please tell me how to keep dried fruits and vegetables safely. I've had trouble with mice and insects getting in my dried corn and berries. Also I've had a little mold on some of my dried berries."

Here's what the scientists say about keeping dried foods. They say tight containers like glass jars, tin cans, tin boxes with tight-fitting lids, and stone crocks with covers that can be sealed are all safe against mice, insects, and moisture which encourages mold. They suggest that if you have glass jars but no rubber rings, or jars not perfect around the top, you can seal these jars ^{tight} with a strip of muslin dipped in hot paraffin and placed over the opening.

Dried foods must be kept dry, if they are to keep. They will keep for a year or longer if they are sealed in moistureproof containers and stored in a cool, dark, dry place. Examine the dry food occasionally. If you see any signs of moisture, reheat the dried food to 165 degrees Fahrenheit, and then reseal.

Here's another tip from the scientists about dried foods. They say to store these foods away in small quantities. As dried foods are best if used a short time after opening, it is well to store them in small amounts. A number of small bags



may be filled, labeled, and placed in a lard can or small crock. Of course, the can or crock must be sealed.

Now for a garden question. This is a frequent question, especially from beginning gardeners: "Are coal and wood ashes good for garden soil?"

Garden experts say the use of coal ashes on heavy clay soils will help make the soil lighter but will not help as a fertilizer. Screen ashes before they go on the garden to remove any clinkers or cinders. Then spread them evenly on the land and mix them thoroughly with it. Coal ashes have very little value as a fertilizer. Their use is mainly to loosen the soil and make it more workable.

Wood ashes, produced by burning hardwood like oak or hickory, are of value as fertilizer because they may contain as much as 7 percent potash and also a little lime. But wood ashes produced by burning pine and other softwoods have little value as fertilizer. Neither have hardwood ashes that have stood outdoors and have had their potash leached from them.

If you have reasonably dry unleached hardwood ashes, use 50 pounds or less on a plot of ground 30 by 60 feet in size, and mix them very thoroughly with the soil.

That's all the questions for today. More coming up on Tuesday.

