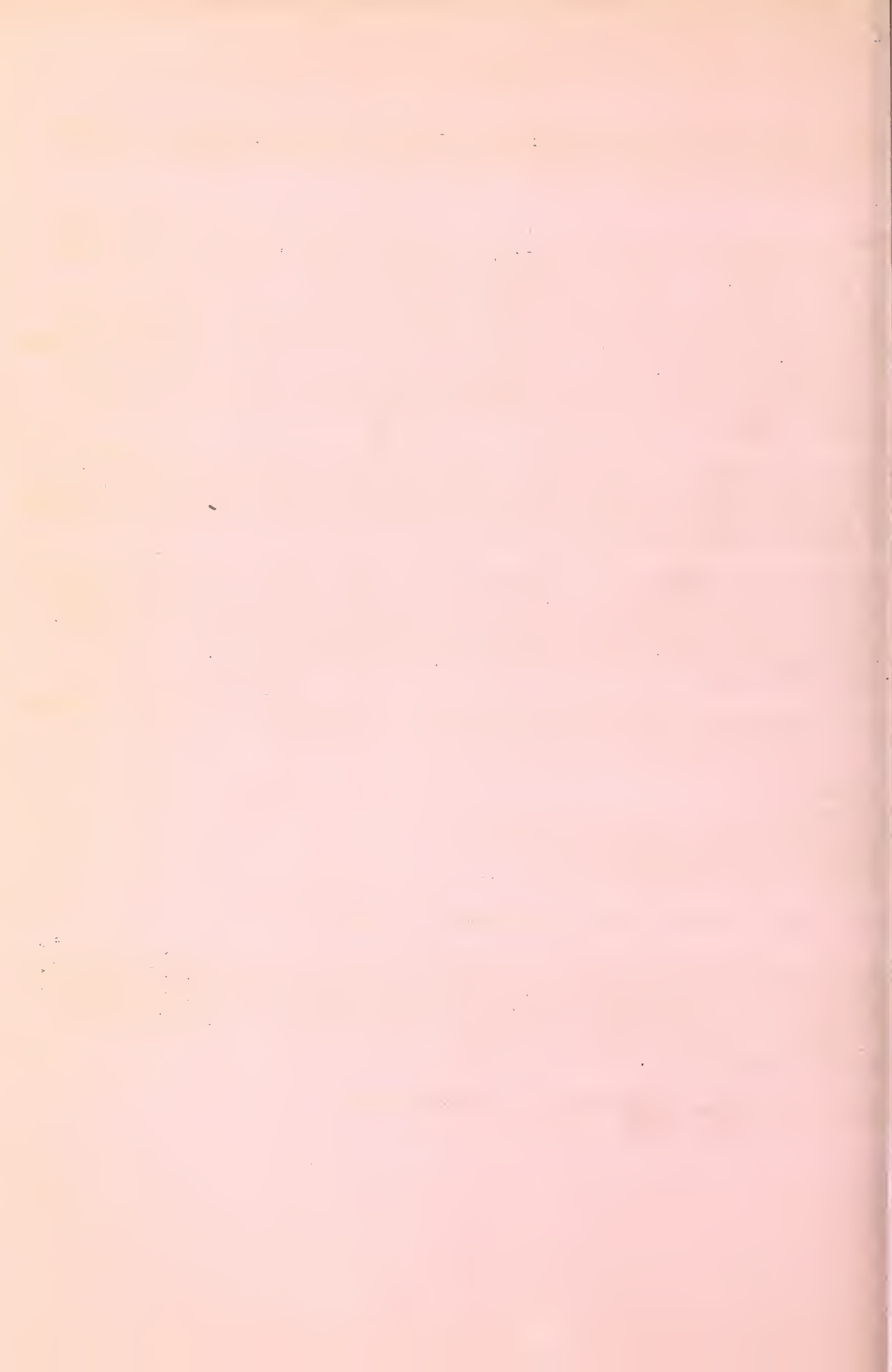


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★ JUNE 1933 ★  
U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, June 13, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Saving Foods by Home Drying." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

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According to the history books, the Indians taught the early settlers how to save food by drying it. Dried corn, dried wild berries, dried and smoked meat and fish--these foods actually kept many of our forefathers from death by starvation during the first hard winters. But the Indians were not the first people to discover that drying was a convenient way to keep food for seasons when fresh supplies weren't available. For countless generations people in warm, dry lands have spread their fruits and vegetables out in the sun to dry. And old-time housekeepers in climates with less sunshine have dried their garden surplus over their kitchen stoves or in the oven.

In these economy times many families are living on what they raise and preserve themselves. Both city and farm families have their own gardens to supply fresh vegetables during the summer and a pantryful of supplies for next winter. You can preserve your garden surplus in different ways--by canning, by pickling, by drying, by storing and so on. Which is the best method of preservation? That depends on the food and on several other circumstances. But drying has several points in its favor. Drying is a simple, convenient and economical method, well worth knowing when you have to save expense. Drying is especially economical if the sun can do the job. You don't need expensive equipment for saving food in this way. And you don't need special containers for storing it. If you haven't much storage space in your pantry, dried supplies are convenient because they take up little room. Also they're light and easy to carry compared to fresh foods or foods put up in any other way.

But don't get the idea that I'm in favor of drying your entire stock of provisions for winter. Drying has its disadvantages as well as its advantages. In the first place, many garden products do not dry successfully. Drying changes their flavor or color or texture so they aren't appetizing. Some foods deteriorate rapidly after drying. Then again, some garden products, just as they are, keep so well in storage cellars or pits that drying is a waste of time and labor. Finally, dried foods need careful cooking, if the family is to enjoy them, while canned or pickled foods don't need this extra preparation.

So much for the pros and cons of drying. Now about the process itself. Let's talk about sundrying first, since that's the most economical way of preserving food. For successful sundrying you need a warm, bright, rainless season right at the time your crops are ready for drying. This is why the interior districts of California are ideal for drying early and late fruits and why sundrying has become such a popular industry in California and the Southwest generally. In the inter-mountain region of the Northwest, over a large part of the Great Plains, and in all but the coastal regions of the South, housekeepers can sundry such early fruits as berries, cherries, apricots and peaches. And in many places the warm, rainless weather continues far enough into the fall to allow for sundrying the later fruits like apples.



pears and plums and such vegetables as sweet corn, pumpkins and squash. Unless you're sure of your weather, better not depend entirely on the sun for drying, since a few days of rain may spoil all your valuable material. Sundrying in the open air has its disadvantages, too. Insects may deposit their eggs on your fruit or the wind blowing over it may get it dusty. Covers of mosquito netting will keep off the insects. If you are drying small quantities of berries or other fruits in the sun, you can spread them on clean boards or cloth or heavy wrapping paper held in place by strips of lath laid along the edges. The sloping roof of a woodshed or a low porch with a southern exposure will make a fine place for drying. But if you're drying large quantities of food, you'll want trays for convenience in stacking and handling.

If you live in a cloudy climate, a cookstove drier will be convenient for day-by-day drying of the food as it ripens in your garden. Cookstove driers may be just single trays or open racks supporting several trays suspended from the ceiling or built in a cabinet. Some of these have a capacity of as much as one to two bushels. Choose your own style of drier and let the man of the house build it. By the way, elaborate and costly equipment doesn't bring any better results than simple homemade equipment. Good results come from good quality raw material and the right temperatures for drying rather than the kind of drier you use. Many housekeepers even use the ovens of their cookstoves. They spread the berries or other fruits in baking tins or pie tins, and then place these on racks so they won't be in contact with the hot oven wall. The oven door stays open to let the water vapor out and the oven is warm, not hot. Other housekeepers simply dry their foods spread out on boards or papers above or near the warm stove.

What foods are best and easiest to dry at home? Fruits first. Plums, especially those of the prune type; sweet cherries; currants; raspberries; blackberries; apricots; peaches; apples and pears - in fact, you can dry practically every one of the fruits, even strawberries, successfully, under favorable conditions. Well-ripened sweet pears, and ripe figs, when dried, are almost like confections. Both these fruits hold their flavor during drying and make a rich delicious product.

Among the vegetables, you can dry stringless beans successfully, but always take the pods when they are young and tender. You can dry onions cut in thin slices, carrots cut in small cubes or slices, tomatoes in a paste form, and all kinds of herbs for winter use. And you can ripen lima beans, kidney beans, and black-eye peas and store them in a dry condition. In sections where you can keep carrots, salsify, parsnips, and beets stored in their natural state, it doesn't pay to dry them, although all these vegetables dry well.

Tomorrow: "Aids to Appetite," how to dress up low-cost dishes so they'll rouse appetites.







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