homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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QUESTION BOX
Wash paint?
Why wash wall from the bottom up?
How mend crack in tub?
Why rice turns green.

ANSWERS FROM
Chemists and home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

Once again here are more questions from the week's mailbag. And once again the answers come from scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Let's start with a question about washing painted walls. A housewife says: "Is it safe to wash a painted wall with soap and water?"

The bulletin on housecleaning published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture says: The oil or varnish types of paint have little or no water in them so they withstand cleaning with soap and water better than other kinds of paint. The glossier the paint, the better it withstands cleaning. Casein paints may be gently washed but will not withstand severe scrubbing. Calcimine may be brushed, but cannot be washed. Whitewash is a mixture of slaked lime and water, and cannot be washed.

So whether it is safe to wash a painted wall or not depends on the kind of paint on the wall. If the wall is painted with an oil or varnish paint, especially a glossy or shiny finish paint, it will take to washing pretty well, provided you do the job correctly. But if the paint is calcimine or whitewash, water will wash the paint off. Brushing is the only way to clean calcimine or whitewash. If brushing won't do the job properly, a new coat of paint is the only answer.

Here's another question about washing walls: "Please tell me why the directions for washing walls always say to start at the bottom and wash up.

I should think it would be easier to start at the top."

The answer to this question also comes from the bulletin on housecleaning. The bulletin says: Walls and wood trim should be washed from the bottom up. When water runs down on a soiled wall, it leaves streaks that are difficult or impossible to remove. But when water runs down a wall that has already been moistened and cleaned, it does not leave difficult stains.

Once you have washed a soiled painted wall, you will agree that it's quite a job. So you'll be interested in this tip from the housecleaning bulletin The bulletin says: "After painted walls have been washed, a thin coat of ordinary laundry starch may be applied with a paint brush. The next time the wall needs washing, the job is much easier because the dirt washes off with the starch." That's to make the job a little easier next time.

Now let's go on to a question about a cracked laundry tub. A housewife writes: "Is there any way to mend a crack in a stone laundry tub?"

Chemists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say you can make a tub of slate, soapstone, or cement watertight by filling the crack with a paste of litharge and glycerin or with a specially prepared commercial cement. Litharge is a crude red lead. When mixed with glycerin it hardens very fast, so you must work fast in filling the crack. For a small crack you will need only about a cupful of litharge, and a small amount of the cheapest glycerin, not the expensive refined product. Stir these together to form a smooth heavy paste free from lumps. But before you mix the paste, be sure the crack is well cleaned out, free of all grease and dirt. If it is too small to get the paste in easily, chip out a bit so the cement can "get in and take hold," as the repair man says. Work the paste into the crack with a case knife. By the way, an old fashioned mixture for mending such a crack is white of egg and lump lime.

This is just one of many questions about plumbing repairs that often come in the mailbag. Many of these repairs you can make yourself at home if you know how. So you may be interested in having on hand a bulletin that tells you how. The U. S. Department of Agriculture publishes a bulletin called "Simple Plumbing Repairs in the Home." It is No. 1460. While the free supply lasts, you are welcome to a copy. Send a postcard to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. asking for "Simple Plumbing Repairs in the Home."

Now Here's the last question. This one is about cooking rice. The letter says: "Can you explain what makes white rice turn a greyish green color when it is boiled?"

Food scientists say minerals in the water in some sections of the country cause boiled rice to have a grayish or greenish cast. A pinch of cream of tartar in the cooking water will prevent this discoloration.

That's all the questions for today. More are coming--more questions and more answers--on Thursday.

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