homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, January 15, 1942

QUESTION BOX	ANSWERS FROM
When prune fruit trees? Best foods for vitamin A? Black-eyedpeas the same as soybeans?	Horticulturists and home economists, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Already garden questions are coming in. Today's mail bag has one on pruning fruit trees, and another on field peas and soybeans. Then there's a question about nightblindness and its connection with lack of vitamin A in the diet, Horticulturists and home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have helped us with the answers.

The first letter writer wants to know when to prune her grape vines and fruit trees.

The fruit specialists say, generally speaking, pruning is done in the dormant season. You can prune trees and vines at any time during the dormant season in regions where severe freezes do not occur. Elsewhere postpone pruning until spring and until danger of severe freezing is past. Don't postpone too long, however, or new growth may start. Make all cuts close to the trunk or limb from which you remove branches.

Each kind of fruit tree has some special needs to consider in pruning, and so have grapevines. For example, you prune certain kinds to shade the fruit -- others to spread the growth of branches -- others for compact, bushy tops. A number of different fruit trees and their pruning needs are discussed in a free bulletin which you can get by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Just ask for Farmers' Bulletin 1870-F -- Pruning Hardy Fruit Plants. And at the same time you might ask for Leaflet 172-L -- Why Fruit Trees Fail to Bear. Perhaps your trees are too old, or not old enough, or they may need special care in pruning.

Our next inquiry is about vitamin A. "I have heard that it is important to eat foods that furnish plenty of vitamin A to prevent nightblindness, especially if we have blackouts. Please tell me which foods supply the most vitamin A."

The home economists say: Some foods, particularly fish-liver oils and liver, supply vitamin A directly. Other foods, including the leafy green vegetables, and yellow fruits and vegetables, such as kale, spinach, carrots, apricots, peaches, and a number of others, supply vitamin A indirectly in the form of carotene which changes into vitamin A in the body. Butter, cream, whole milk and eggs contain both vitamin A and carotene.

Now about how much we need of foods that supply vitamin A either directly or indirectly. There are several important considerations. One is, the larger the person, the more vitamin A he or she needs to prevent nightblindness. Another is, that the body does not use carotene as well as vitamin A directly obtained. Still another point is that the amounts of vitamin A and carotene that are generally recommended as a minimum daily allowance do not allow anything for storage in the body. So the home economists say that you need to eat liberal quantities of foods used for this vitamin. A normal adult requires daily: A pint of whole milk, one egg, two ordinary sized pats of butter -- that's about one-third of an ounce -- and an average serving of a leafy green or yellow vegetable. You don't have to include exactly these foods, of course, since many other foods are rated as good sources of vitamin A.

For example, to get variety in the diet, for vitamin A you could eat liver or cheese instead of an egg; any leafy green vegetable, and instead of a yellow vegetable like carrots, yellow squash or sweetpotatoes, you could have red tomatoes, or a yellow-fleshed fruit -- say apricots or yellow peaches. Some other good sources of vitamin A at this time of year are red salmon, Brussels sprouts, globe artichokes, avocadoes, bananas, olives, deep-yellow juice oranges, and yellow cornmeal.

Now for our third and last letter. This woman writes: "I would like to know if the 'black-eyed field peas' are the same as soybeans? They taste the the same to me. If they are not, what is the difference in food value?"

Possibly cooked dried soybeans taste a little like cooked dried black-eyed peas, to you, but green or fresh soybeans are quite different. They are rich and nutty in flavor and have a very attractive green color.

In food value soybeans are also quite different from black-eyed peas, the home economists say. Soybeans are the nearest approach in the vegetable kingdom to what we call "efficient protein" from animal sources -- meats, eggs, milk, cheese or fish. That's why people of the Orient get along as well as they do with very little meat, eggs or milk -- they eat lots of soybeans.

Black-eyed peas contain protein of a certain kind, but it is not of the same high quality as the protein of soybeans. Black-eyed peas are similar in food value to other members of the bean and pea family. They contain more carbohydrate, or starch, and less fat, than soybeans.

If you would like to try some of the desirable green varieties of soybeans in your food garden this spring, write to your State agricultural Experiment Station for the names of varieties that grow well where you live. And you can get a free leaflet that tells how to cook both green and dried soybeans by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Ask for Leaflet 116-L, Soybeans for the Table.

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