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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE



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Thursday, June 4, 1942.

QUESTION BOX

How dry cherries?
Vacation lunches for children?
How guard against ticks?

U. S. Department of Agriculture

Answers from:
Home economists, market spec-
ialists and entomologists of the
U. S. Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

Today's question box includes an inquiry about drying cherries, a suggestion about lunches at school in vacation time, and a request for information on protection against ticks. Scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have supplied the answers to these questions.

Drying fruits and vegetables at home is an old-fashioned method of food preservation which is being revived. Considerable research on home drying is now under way, but it's quite feasible to go on using the methods that have worked well in the past. Here's what the home economists say about drying cherries:

Good varieties for drying are Tartarian, Bing, Lambert, Dikeman, sour and pie cherries. Select the cherries when just ripe. Pit only the very large cherries, if any. Unless you can use the juice, it's better not to pit them. Wash the cherries, remove the stems and any imperfect fruit.

You can hasten the drying considerably if you dip the fruit for 30 to 40 seconds in a solution of boiling lye, to remove the natural waxy coating and crack the skins. Make this solution by dissolving 5 ounces of concentrated commercial lye in 2 gallons of water. Heat to boiling. After dipping the fruit in the lye solution, wash it thoroughly to remove the lye.

Spread the cherries on trays in single layers. Place the trays in a drier. You can use either the "birdcage" type of dryer, hung over the cookstove, or a cabinet drier set on top of it. Start drying at a temperature of 120 degrees,

and never let the temperature go over 150 degrees. Continue the drying until the cherries are rigid and brittle, but don't let them dry too fast. You can learn to tell by the "feel" of the material on the trays whether it is drying in a satisfactory way. It should be moist to the touch and cooler than the air flowing over it until it is completely dry. If you dry at too high a temperature at first, the cherries will harden on the outside and remain too moist on the inside.

Condition the cherries for storing by spreading them out on a flat surface in a warm room, screened from insects. Stir them occasionally every day for several days. If they are not thoroughly dry after a few days, return them to the drier.

As a final precaution against insects, just before storing return the cherries to the drier and reheat for 10 to 15 minutes.

Your dried cherries will keep for a year or more if you seal them in moisture proof containers such as glass jars, or tin cans or tin boxes with tight-fitting lids. Don't use large containers; small amounts in several small containers are better. If you have no rubber rings for your glass jars or if the jars are not perfect around the top, you can seal them with a strip of muslin dipped in hot paraffin and placed over the opening.

If your storeroom is good and dry, you might also put some of your dried cherries in heavy paper or cloth bags dipped in melted paraffin. Store the dried cherries in a dark, cool place.

Now we come to a suggestion from a mother whose children have had a good lunch at school all through the school year. She wants to know why lunches couldn't be served at the local playgrounds in vacation time if a committee would arrange to supervise the plan. And she asks:

"We mothers would like to know if the free foods that were given the school in the past would be continued for a vacation lunch plan?"

The Agricultural Marketing Administration of the Department, which handles these special foods, says that under some circumstances it is quite possible to get them. It is very desirable for children to have them if they are on the nutritional borderline and likely to slip backward if the lunches they have been used to are stopped.

The thing for these mothers to do is to form a committee before school is over, find sponsors for the vacation lunch program who will supplement the free foods, and supervise the serving of the lunches. This committee might also get the school health officer or nurse to certify the children who particularly need the foods, and call on the local AMA representative for further information.

The subject of vacation lunches for school children reminds one of other vacation meals-- particularly picnics. This year, because of the limitations on tires and gasoline, groups of young people are likely to go hiking or bicycling to convenient picnic spots nearby.

Here's a letter from a mother who has heard that in many regions there are ticks in the woods. She wants to know if tick bites are dangerous, and what to do if she finds one on little Johnny.

A tick bite may result in nothing worse than local soreness, the entomologists of the Department say. Or it may serve as a point of infection for that serious tick-borne disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Rocky Mountain spotted fever has been discovered in nearly every state, and sometimes it is fatal. Ticks also carry tularemia or rabbit fever, and several other diseases.

If you find a tick on one of your children remove and destroy it at once and apply iodine to the bite. You often find many ticks on dogs. In such cases they should be removed with tweezers and dropped into a can of kerosene. On people, ticks seem to like to attach themselves at the edge of the hair on the back of the neck. If they don't stay attached more than 6 hours, there is little danger of infection. So if you believe there are ticks about, go over the children carefully, looking for ticks, about every 6 hours.

You don't have to go into deep woods or travel far from home to encounter ticks. They may be in the underbrush along the walks near your home, or in the hedgerow near your vegetable garden. Just keep a constant watch during May and June. By August they disappear.

That finishes up the questions for today.

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