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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Tuesday, April 21, 1942

Question Box:

How put out fat fire?
How clean kitchen walls
and woodwork?
Why smoke pipes corrode
when idle?
Wax for special floorings?

Answers from:

Chemists and engineers of the
U. S. Department of Agriculture

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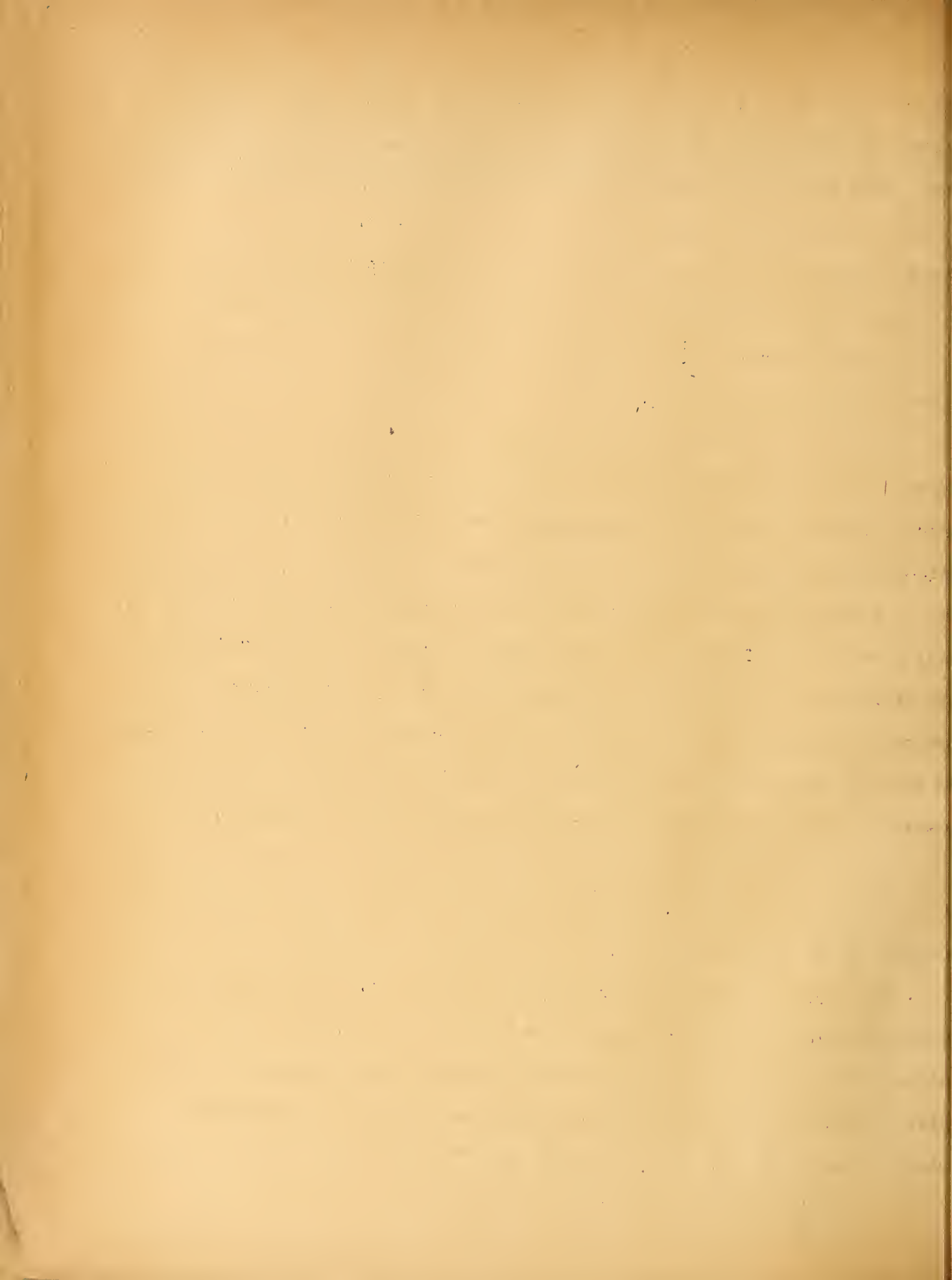
Here's Tuesday again, the day for questions and answers. The answers to this week's batch of questions come from chemists and engineers of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Let's begin with a letter that needs a prompt answer. A housewife writes:

"The other day when I was trying to melt down and save some left-over fat, the fat caught on fire. I had great trouble putting the fire out and during that time the greasy smoke blackened all the walls and painted woodwork in the kitchen. Now I have two questions to ask. First, what is a quick way to put out the flame when fat catches on fire? Second, how can I remove the black from my kitchen woodwork and walls?"

Chemists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture who have studied fire prevention say the best way to put out a fat fire is to smother it. If you try to pour on water, you are likely to scatter the burning fat. If fat catches fire in a saucepan on top of the stove, place a lid on the pan immediately. If this does not put the fire out take a large cloth or dish towel, moisten it and lay it over the pan. It will cut air off from the fire and put out the fire automatically. If fat gets on fire in the broiler of the oven, cut off broiler flame. Prepare large moist cloth or towel--then open broiler and spread moist cloth over burning fat.

Needless to say, fat never needs to "catch fire" if you give it the proper



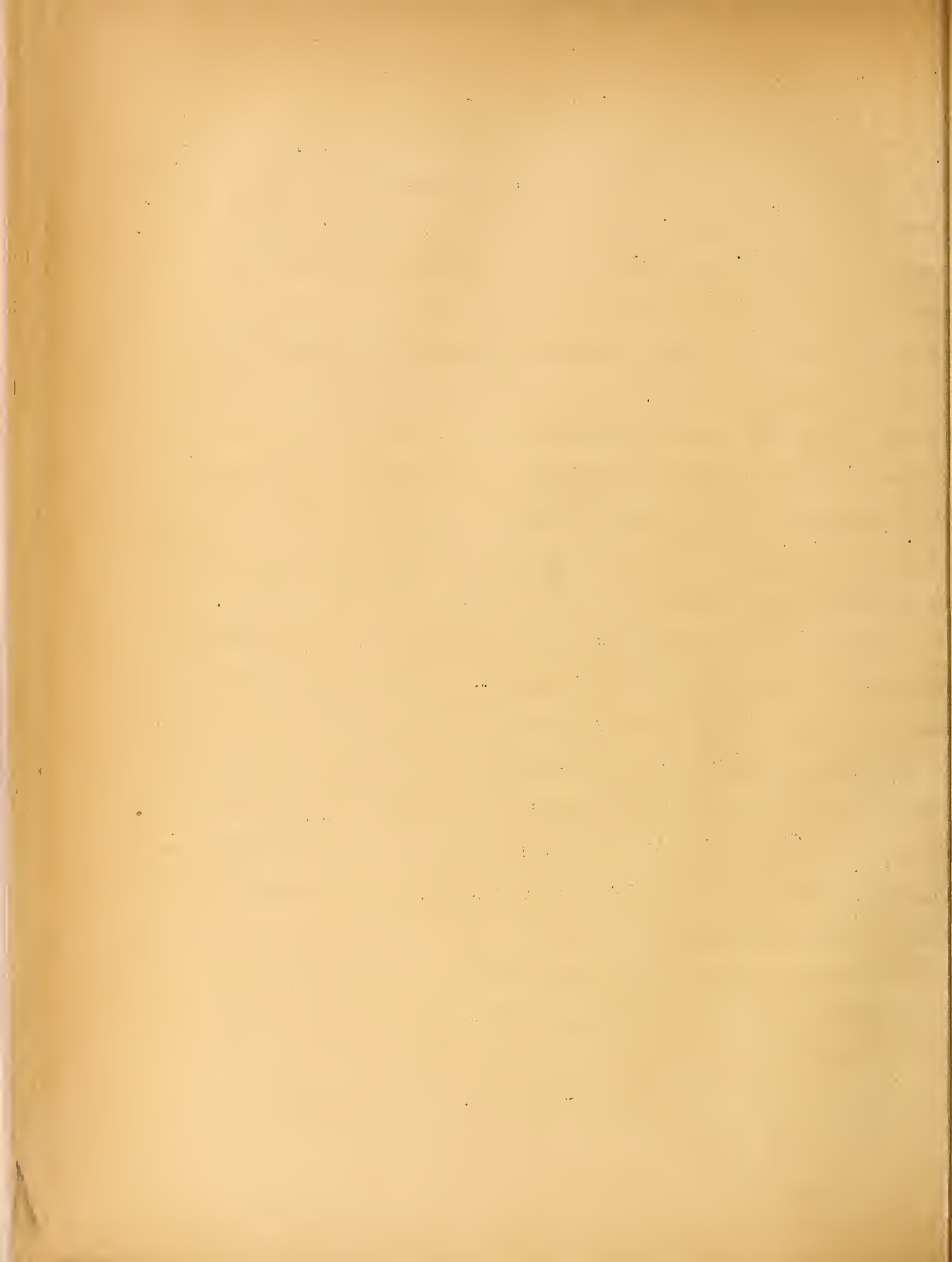
care and don't forget it on the stove. When you are "trying out" fat, do it in a double boiler over hot water so that it is protected from the direct heat of the stove. Cook bacon slowly over low heat. Never let fat reach the smoking point, to say nothing of the burning point. Smoking is the signal that fat is beginning to "break down" or decompose. Fat that has been heated until it smokes turns rancid more rapidly and usually is less digestible.

So much for the fire and the fat. Now about that smoky smudge left on the kitchen walls and woodwork.

You can buy good commercial preparations for cleaning paint in the stores. Or you can make your own soap jelly for cleaning. To make soap jelly, dissolve one part of mild or neutral soap flakes in 5 parts of hot water. Allow this to stand until cool. Dip a clean piece of heavy cloth into the soap jelly, and apply to the wall or woodwork with up-and-down strokes, overlapping to avoid streaks, Wash a small space at a time. Then rinse the space with another cloth and clean water and wipe dry. Change the water often so you won't rub dirt back on the walls. In this particular kitchen the dirt is from greasy smoke, so a little kerosene oil added to the soap jelly may help in cleaning. Very soiled places may need cleaning with powdered whiting and water. Always remember to rinse off with clean water afterward.

Now for the second letter up for answer today. A housewife wants to know if it is true that pipes of furnaces and stoves go to pieces faster in summer than in winter when they are in use.

Engineers of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say: Yes, smoke pipes of stoves and furnaces do deteriorate more in idle time than when in use because moisture collects on the soot left in the pipe, and forms an acid which attacks the metal. Usually smoke pipes of furnaces don't rust out but corrode from this "soot acid."



The way to save your smoke pipes is to clean them thoroughly when you let the fire go out in the spring. If the furnace is in a damp basement, store the pipe for the summer in the attic or some other dry place. This will keep moisture from collecting in the pipe and forming the acid that destroys the metal. Wrapping in newspapers helps preserve the pipe, too; so does painting the outside and inside of the pipe with asphaltum.

If you must put the pipe back on the furnace after cleaning, be sure to leave all doors, dampers and openings wide open to allow free air circulation.

The engineers say to care for the pipes of small heating stoves and the stoves themselves in the same way. Use old-fashioned stove blacking to help preserve the metal of the stove. It does not create a disagreeable odor like asphaltum paint when the fire is first started.

Last question: "The mastic tile which we used on our basement floor has become soft and rough looking in places since we waxed it. Can you tell me whether ordinary floor wax could damage this kind of floor covering?"

Manufacturers of linoleum, cork, mastic tile, and rubber floor coverings advise using only self-polishing wax or water wax on these floorings. The solvents used in other kinds of wax may dissolve or damage the material in these floorings. Self-polishing waxes are emulsions of wax in water, and the wax used is mostly carnauba which makes a tough film. Self-polishing waxes have great covering power and are inexpensive for frequent application.

That's all the questions and answers for today. More on Thursday.

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