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homemakers' chat

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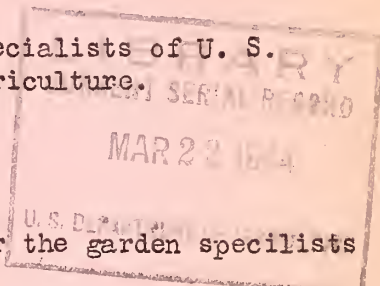
U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 1944.

QUESTION BOX

When plant spring cabbage?
What is 5-10-5 fertilizer?

ANSWERS FROM garden specialists of U. S.
Department of Agriculture.



Our mail today has brought two timely questions for the garden specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture to answer. They're both garden questions, so gather round, victory gardeners, while the experts give the answers.

First comes a letter that says, "I'd like to have some spring cabbage in my garden. When and how should I plant it?"

Set out spring cabbage very early -- experienced local gardeners or agricultural advisers, or your state agricultural college, can tell you the best time to plant cabbage in your community. But generally speaking, figure on from 4 to 6 weeks before the date of the last spring frost.

It's usually more convenient, and efficient, for small gardeners in towns and cities to buy the few cabbage plants they need, rather than growing them at home. Cabbage usually stands transplanting better than some of the other vegetables, but nevertheless it needs careful handling.

Set early varieties of cabbage plants about 18 inches apart, and have the rows 30 inches apart. See that the soil is fine and loose before you put in the plants. Make a hole in the soil, with your hand, or a peg or trowel, and be sure the hole is large enough so the roots and the soil clinging to them won't be crowded. Set the plant into the hole a little deeper than it grew in the plant bed or flat...then fill in around the roots, pressing the soil firmly so no air pockets are left. If the soil is somewhat dry, pour water on the roots before you finish filling in the hole...but if you get the earth around

the roots muddy be careful not to press the soil down too hard, or it may cake around the roots.

Apply a complete fertilizer when you transplant cabbage, but take care that it doesn't touch the roots or the leaves. Cabbage needs either a very fertile soil, or heavy applications of a fertilizer that's high in nitrogen. In addition to applying fertilizer when you transplant, put on two top dressings of nitrate of soda, ammonium sulfate, or ammonium nitrate, at about monthly intervals after the plants are in. Ammonium nitrate is very concentrated fertilizer, nearly twice as strong as nitrate of soda, so use only about half as much of it -- a pint to 100 feet of row.

One of the big problems in growing cabbage for a small family, is how to avoid having it all mature at once. If you can get a few plants each of two or three varieties that will mature a week or so apart. If you can get only one variety, it will be to your advantage if all the plants don't head at the same time.

And that should answer our letter about cabbage. Now for our next letter. This listener writes, "I hear so much talk about 5-10-5 fertilizer, and 3-8-7, and so on, but I don't understand what those terms mean. Can you explain them to me?"

The numbers on commercial fertilizer tell what its plant-food value is, by showing the analysis of the fertilizer -- that is, the proportions of nitrogen, phosphate, and potash it contains. The amounts of these three minerals are always given in the same order...so you know the first figure stands for nitrogen content... the second for phosphorus, and the third for potassium.

For example, 5-10-5 means 5 parts out of 100, or 5 percent, of the fertilizer, is nitrogen...10 percent is phosphate... and 5 percent potash.

The rest of the fertilizer-- the percentage that the analysis doesn't

account for-- is mainly material that acts as a carrier for the fertilizing elements.

Fertilizers that contain nitrogen, phosphate, and potash are known as "complete fertilizers." The victory garden fertilizers are complete fertilizers.

Soil experts tell us that nitrogen is the element most likely to be lacking in the soil. The air is about 80 percent nitrogen-- but it's in such a form that garden plants unfortunately can't take it directly out of the air-- so we have to add nitrogen to the soil in fertilizer or manures.

Phosphates and potash aren't as scarce in the soil as nitrogen, but they're likely to be lacking in sufficient quantity in light, loose, sandy soil.

It's a good idea to use a complete fertilizer on your garden unless you've manured it heavily, or unless you know that it has recently produced a large vigorous crop of plants.

Last year all the victory garden fertilizer was 3-8-7. This year the kind you buy will depend on where you live: on the Pacific coast, gardeners will get 6-10-4... in the Midwest, 4-12-4... and on the Atlantic Coast, and in the South, 5-10-5.

Each of these victory garden fertilizers has more nitrogen than last year's fertilizer. Also, they all contain 20 units of plant food-- that is, 20 percent of the total amount of fertilizer is plant food-- while last year's fertilizer has only 18 unit of plant food.

