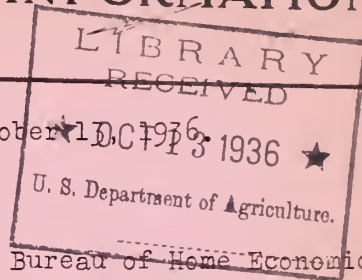


Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, October 10, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Kitchen questions are on the docket today, listeners -- plenty of kitchen questions. In fact, this promises to be another of your Aunt Sammy's fast-talking Tuesdays.

Right here on top of the mail-pile, I find several questions about fried food. That's a good indication that fall is really here in earnest. Along with cooler weather come appetites for heartier foods. October is certainly the month for doughnuts. And you might say it starts the season for fritters and croquettes, for French-fried potatoes and Sunday-morning fish cakes.

Oddly enough, the process called frying -- I'm referring now not to "frying pan" frying but to "deep-fat" frying -- this process has baffled many a good cook who can bake and roast and boil to perfection. Too many fritters have come out soggy and grease-soaked, or perhaps have come out too brown with a scorched-fat taste. Yet once you get the principles of frying, why then you find that it isn't such a complicated process after all.

Probably the 3 most important points for success in frying are: using the right kind of fat; heating the fat to the right temperature and keeping it there during the frying; and preparing the food properly before frying. But wait. I'm getting ahead of my questions.

The first question comes from a lady who is having difficulty following an old family recipe for doughnuts. She writes: "The doughnut recipe which has been passed down in our family says: 'Heat the fat until it smokes.' But I find that smoking fat makes a horrid smell in my kitchen and doesn't seem to cook the doughnuts properly. Will you tell me just how hot the fat should be?"

Answer: I'll report to you what the foods people at the Bureau of Home Economics have to say on the subject. They ought to know because they have been doing a good deal of recent investigating on the subject of fats and frying. First, they emphatically disagree with the directions you quoted from that old-fashioned recipe. That recipe was probably worked out long ago before housewives had the good frying fats that they have today. The foods people say: "Thumbs down on smoking fat for any sort of cooking." You see, at the smoking temperature fat begins to break down, actually to change its chemical composition which makes it take on an unpleasant flavor and become less digestible. Also fat that has reached the smoking point does not cook successfully. If you choose the right kind of fat for frying, and then if you regulate the temperature carefully, you never need to have smoking trouble.

Which brings us to the question of what the right sort of fat is. Well, you have your choice of many good cooking fats nowadays -- everything from cooking oils like cottonseed or corn oil to high-quality lard and the many solid cooking fats now on the market. The best fat for frying has a high smoking temperature -- that is, it can stand heating to a point high enough to cook different kinds of food without smoking and thus deteriorating. The ideal cooking fat will not smoke below 390 degrees F. You may be interested to know that animal fats reach the smoking temperature more quickly than vegetable fats. Impurities in the fat such as particles of flour or crumbs will bring the smoking point down. That is why good cooks are careful to strain frying fat after using.

So much for fat facts. Now about frying temperatures. To answer the letter about doughnut frying temperature, I'll tell you first that doughnuts fry best when the fat is heated to 365 degrees F. If you have no frying thermometer, the next best way to test the heat of the fat is to drop inch-cubes of bread in it and notice how long they take to brown. At 365 degrees, the bread will brown in 60 seconds.

Different kinds of food need different frying temperatures. The foods people find that dry uncooked foods like doughnuts and fritters take the lowest temperature -- from 350 to 365 degrees. Then, cooked foods like cheese balls and croquettes made of previously cooked food, need a hotter fat -- temperature from 365 to 382. And finally damp cold uncooked foods like potatoes for French frying take the highest temperature of all -- from 382 to 390 degrees. As we mentioned a moment ago, a frying thermometer is the safest and most accurate check on the temperature. But you can also use the bread-cube test that I referred to just now. Dry uncooked foods need fat that browns an inch-cube of bread in 60 seconds; cooked foods need fat that browns bread in 40 seconds; and damp cold uncooked foods, particularly French-fried potatoes need fat that will brown bread in 20 seconds.

That brings me to the next question -- an old, old question, by the way. "Dear Aunt Sammy: Please tell me whether all fried foods are indigestible?"

Answer: Far from it. Fried foods have been unjustly slandered just because many cooks haven't known how to fry properly. Whether a fried food is appetizing and wholesome depends a good deal on how it was fried. If the fat was too hot, and had begun to smoke, it might cause trouble. Or if it was not hot enough and soaked into the food, again it might take some time to digest. But properly fried foods are not only delicious but wholesome for any normal adult. Food cooked properly in deep fat has a crisp crust all over the surface and the fat will penetrate no farther than that crust. Just one more point about fat and your digestion. Some people have trouble if they eat fried foods along with an otherwise very hearty meal. But don't blame the fried food. The mistake here is just plain overeating.

