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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE



Thursday, May 14, 1942

QUESTION BOX:

Length of women's dresses?

Refrange tin cans?

Safeguard against weevils?

ANSWERS FROM:

Home economists and entomologists of
the U.S. Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

Another Thursday,-- and more questions on subjects of current interest. One woman wants to know about the length of women's dresses in the future. Another wants to save tin cans by making new flanges on them. And there's a question about weevils. As usual, we have turned these questions over to the scientists in the U. S. Department of Agriculture to answer.

Here's an inquiry from a worried lady who writes: "Is it true that the government has regulated the length of women's dresses?"

And the home economists reply,- yes, it's true,- as far as manufacturers are concerned. The War Production Board has issued regulations for the simplification of woolen dresses, suits and coats now being made up for next fall and winter. These rules don't apply to the clothes you see now. They are all intended to save material in one way and another, but will cause no real hardship. For example, the total permitted length of a size 16 dress is 43 inches from neck to hem, but the dress can have a 2-inch hem, and if you are vert tall, you can let that out, of course. Other parts of garments that will be made of less cloth are the sleeves, the pockets, and the skirt width. Few or no tucks or pleats will be used. The War Production Board expects the simpler styles to save about 100 million yards of cloth each year. Restrictions on cotton, rayon, and other summer fabrics won't apply until this year's production is completed and on the way to consumers.

None of the regulations apply to the woman who sews at home. Naturally, if you make your own clothes, you will follow the current styles when you buy a pattern.

You'll choose a simple design that will cut without waste, and buy only as much material as the pattern calls for:

The appearance of both homemade and ready-made clothes in the future will depend largely on careful workmanship-- good fit, fine, even stitching, neat finishing. You may see a gradual shift from styles that require metal fasteners to those that have buttons and buttonholes, ties of the dress fabric, or no fastenings at all.

Beautifully made buttonholes and appropriate buttons add to the tailored effect of a costume. You can still choose from many kinds of buttons, or make your own buttons and belt buckles by covering molds of cardboard with scraps of the dress fabric. Some plastic buttons won't stand laundering, but you can always take them off when the dress needs cleaning, and sew them on again. If this is too much trouble, use detachable buttons or tie strings. Felts can tie instead of buckling.

Styles that slip over the head require no fastenings, but have to be made loose at the waist. Surplice front designs can also be made with no fastenings, or with just a tie at one side. This style takes more material, however, than a dress that simply buttons in front.

Next, a canning question. "Is it possible to use tin cans again for this season's canning by reflanging them at home? I understand some of the community centers do this to save tins."

Canning specialists of the Department say it is not desirable to reflange tin cans at home, although it is sometimes done successfully. It takes special equipment which few people have. There is considerable danger of loss through imperfect seals in reflanged cans. Better consult your county extension agent or the manager of your local community center if you have cans on hand which you think could be salvaged and reused if they were reflanged.

A question about weevils comes next,-- those little black beetles you sometimes find in rice or flour.

This homemaker says: "I usually buy loose rice and keep it in a tin canister with a tight lid. The other day I found my rice alive with weevils. The rice looked all right when I put it away. Of course I threw it all out. How do you suppose the weevils get into it, and are they likely to spread in the pantry?"

Sad to say, the weevils may get into every other cereal food you have if you don't act quickly, the entomologists of the Department report. Clean out the tin where the rice was, and scald thoroughly. For safety's sake, do the same with your other cereal containers, even if you don't see any weevils in them now. The eggs of these cereal insects are almost invisible, but may hatch out later. Remember that cereals include not only breakfast foods like cornmeal, corn flakes, oatmeal and whole wheat, but also plain flour and prepared flour products.

Go over the pantry shelves carefully with a stiff brush and soap and water, to remove any old crumbs of flour, cereal, or bread that may be lodged out of sight or any dust or lint in which there might be insect eggs. Cereal beetles or weevils can live for a long time on very small quantities of dry cereal that they find in cracks and crevices of closets and cereal containers. When the new lot of rice or other cereal comes in the eggs may already be in the container, about to hatch.

As to how the insects you report got into the rice, they may have been in the package you bought home, or in the container, if you did not clean it out thoroughly.

If you find a loose webbing in a cereal box, it is probably made by the Indian meal moth. Burn all the material in the box and sterilize the container. Don't keep much in the way of cereals on hand during hot weather. If you are in the habit of grinding your own whole wheat and corn meal at home, make up only a small quantity at a time. Store it tightly covered, in sterilized containers, and use it up quickly. You can sterilize all dry cereals and flour by spreading them in thin layers in two pans and heat them in the oven until they reach 125° F.

