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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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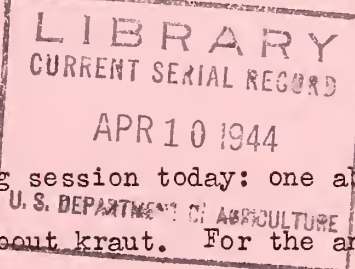
QUESTION BOX:

Eat wild greens?

How make meringue?

More kraut from cabbage crop?

ANSWERS FROM home economists of U.S. Department of Agriculture and War Food specialists.



Three food questions headline the mailbag session today: one about eating wild greens...one about meringues...and one about kraut. For the answers we'll hear from home economists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and officials of the War Food Administration. Here's our first letter:

"I've heard about eating wild greens. Which greens can be used in this way?"

Taking the country as a whole, some 50 to 60 different edible greens grow wild in the fields and along the streams. These wild greens can add variety and zest to springtime meals, and of course this year it's important to use every bit of food available, so if you have wild greens, this is a good time to use them.

Some of the more common wild greens are dandelions, plantains--you'll find these two in many lawns--purslane or pursely, lamb's quarters--or maybe you call it goosefoot, or pigweed--mustard, wild onion, water cress, field cress, and pokeweed, also known as "poor man's asparagus."

Be sure you know the greens you pick, so there won't be any danger of getting poisonous plants by mistake. For example, when you cut pokeweed, take only the tender young shoots, and don't take any part of the root, because pokeweed root is poisonous.

The time to pick wild greens is early in the season, when they're young and tender. All the equipment you need is a knife, or scissors, and a bag or basket to carry the greens in. A word of warning, though: if you plan to gather greens on land belonging to someone else, ask permission--otherwise you may be trespassing.

Remember, the same rules apply to using wild greens as to those you grow or

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buy: to save food value, use quickly...keep cold until used...don't soak...and eat raw, or cook quickly in as little water as possible. Serve cooked greens with the usual dressings--melted fat, lemon juice, vinegar, bits of fried bacon, or whatever you prefer.

Some of the wild greens, such as poke and dandelion, have quite a strong flavor, so parboil them first two or three minutes, then pour off the cooking water and finish cooking in fresh water. Some of the strong-tasting greens combine very pleasantly with those having a milder flavor.

Well, so much for wild greens. Now for a letter about meringues. This homemaker writes, "Sometimes when I make a meringue for pie, the whites will beat up very well until I put in the sugar. Then the foam goes down, and gets soft and liquid. What causes this? Can it be too much sugar?"

Your trouble probably comes from adding the sugar too fast, so that it doesn't get a chance to dissolve. When you make your meringue, first heat the whites just until they form soft peaks, but aren't dry. Then add the sugar, one tablespoon at a time, beating after each addition. After the last addition of sugar, beat again until the whites pile up well.

The homeeconomists advise using 2 tablespoons of sugar for each egg white in making soft meringue for pies. Finely granulated sugar is best, because it dissolves most readily. Superfine or powdered sugar makes a smoother, glossier meringue, but it will be smaller in volume. You can use brown sugar, corn sirup, or honey in a meringue, too, but they require more beating, and the sirup or honey has a tendency to leak on the underside of the meringue.

You no doubt know that meringues need to be baked at moderate heat. High heat shrinks them and makes them tough and watery.

Now for a letter from a housewife who asks, "If cabbage is so plentiful, how does it happen we can't buy more kraut?"

War Food officials say there are a number of reasons why the record cabbage

crop won't give us a big supply of kraut. First of all, large quantities of kraut aren't usually made from winter cabbage...and then, most of the winter cabbage is grown in the South, while the kraut plants are in the North. The War Food Administration is trying to overcome this difficulty by helping kraut packers pay the cost of shipping the cabbage north to the plants. But even so, War Food isn't aiming at more than 50,000 tons of kraut from this crop--and that's less than a third of what this country normally eats.

Last year 91,000 tons of kraut were packed from the summer and fall crops of cabbage, and of that 91,000 tons, 90 percent went to the armed forces. So you can see that between the army and the navy, and the civilian demand, 50,000 tons of kraut won't go very far.

But even though you may not be able to buy more kraut, because of the large cabbage crop, you can easily brine cabbage at home. Cabbage is one of the most abundant foods in most parts of the country right now, so use it often, raw, cooked, or brined.

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