homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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QUESTION BOX
Peel floats in marmalade?
How restore "sugared" honey?
Make pie crust with nuts?
Use sour cream in cake and cookies?
Mixture for popcorn balls

ANSWERS FROM: Food scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

The holidays are coming closer. And questions about holiday food are getting more numerous in the mailbag.

One letter this week asks about orange marmalade. The letter says: "Last year I made orange marmalade as a Christmas gift for some of my friends. But it didn't look very attractive because the pieces of orange peel all went to the top of the jars. Can you tell me how to make marmalade so the pieces of orange are spread evenly through the mixture?"

Cookery scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture suggest that when you take the marmalade from the stove, you let it cool slightly, and then stir it before you pour it into hot sterilized jars and seal. The pieces of orange rise to the top while the marmalade is hot and still thin. Cooling and stirring will distribute them.

Now from marmalade let's turn to a question about honey. A housewife says: "What makes strained honey turn to sugar? I have a jar of this summer's honey that is already turning to sugar."

The foods scientists say honey does not "turn to sugar", because it is sugar in liquid form as it comes from the bees. But on standing honey tends to crystallize which is probably what you mean when you say "turn to sugar". This crystallizing does not change the composition of the honey or harm it in any way. You can easily bring it back to a liquid by standing the jar in moderately hot water, that is,

water at about 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Don't heat honey at a higher temperature because that will injure the flavor and color of the honey.

Now for the third letter waiting for reply today. This letter says: "I have heard about crust made with chopped nuts for pumpkin pie. Please tell me how to make it."

The answer is: Use any satisfactory recipe for plain pie crust and substitute finely ground pecans for one-half the fat. Mix and bake in the usual way. This makes a good crust for cream filling especially if you put chopped nuts over the top of the meringue. But you might also use the nut crust for pumpkin pie.

Now for a question about using sour cream in cakes and cookies. A thrifty housewife says: "Every now and then I find myself with some sour cream on hand and want to use it in cakes or cookies. Please tell me how to change my regular recipes to use sour cream."

The answer is a new leaflet published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., containing a great number of recipes for sour cream. A copy of this leaflet is free to anyone who sends a postcard asking for it while the Department of Agriculture still has free copies. Just write for Leaflet No. 213 called "Sour Cream" to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

Now here's what that leaflet has to say about using sour cream in quick breads, cakes, or cookies. It says: Because 1 cup of heavy sour cream is about 40 percent fat--or contains about 6 tablespoons of fat--heavy sour cream can be used in place of part or all of the fat in recipes for waffles, muffins, biscuits, cake and cookies as well as in place of the milk. But in batters requiring a good deal of liquid, the heavy sour cream may contain more fat than the recipe calls for and the bread or cake will be richer.

If the sour cream you have is thin rather than heavy, the leaflet says you use it in the same way as rich sour milk.

The leaflet says further that in baked products you can use soda alone for leavening, or soda and baking powder together. Use soda in the proportion of a half teaspoon to each cup of sour cream. And here's an important point: Put the soda in with the flour and other dry ingredients instead of adding it direct to the sour cream.

Now for a question about a good candy for children. A mother writes: "Each year we make popcorn balls for the candy to hang on our Christmas trees because they aren't too sweet for the youngsters. But I am not very well satisfied with my recipe. Perhaps you can suggest a better mixture for holding the popcorn together."

Any good recipe for molasses candy or for taffy makes good popcorn balls. Here is a simple mixture of sugar, water, vinegar, and salt that makes delicious balls. Use one and a half cups of sugar....one cup of water....2 tablespoons of vinegar....and a half teaspoon of salt. Boil until the sirup hardens when dropped in cold water or until a candy thermometer registers 250 degrees Fahrenheit. Add a teaspoon of vanilla for flavoring. And pour it hot over about 2 quarts of freshly popped corn and 2 cups of chopped nut kernels. When cool enough to handle, form into balls and wrap in waxed paper to keep the popcorn crisp.

That's all the questions today. More coming up on Thursday.