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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, October 30, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "PLENTY OF ONIONS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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"The test of a good cook lies in her seasonings," someone has said. This week's Market Basket from the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture suggests that this may well mean whether or not she "knows her onions," -- that is, when to add them sparingly, when lavishly. We are then reminded of the soups, stews, hashes and hors-d'oeuvres to which onions give zest, -- and even of that old-fashioned concoction called onion pie.

Of course there are scores of good ways of cooking the onions themselves as one of the vegetables in a well-rounded meal. Food specialists do not claim too much in food value for onions, saying merely, "Onions supply some minerals and some vitamins B and C when eaten raw in salads or sandwiches. Like other vegetables they add useful bulk." But after all, most of us eat onions for flavor rather than for food value.

So it's encouraging to learn from the Federal crop reports that this year's onion production is unusually large, and that the price of onions will probably not get high throughout the early winter. Onions did not suffer during the past season from the freezes or the drought that reduced the supply of many other vegetables and fruits.

I was interested to hear, too, that as a nation, we are credited with eating about 10 pounds of onions apiece per year. However, nearly twelve million sacks of 100 pounds each are in prospect from the late onion crop, so there'll be plenty to go around! Many of these onions are larger sized than is usual for the Yellow Globe type raised in the north and east. Both New York and Michigan have about twice their usual crop of late onions. Indiana, Ohio, and Minnesota are contributing their share of the globe type. These onions are sharper and stronger in flavor than the mild sweet Spanish or Valencia type onions produced in Colorado, Utah, Idaho and Washington, but they are almost as large and can be used in many of the same ways.

Onions are graded for size, maturity, firmness and shape, and percentage of defects. In selecting onions in a store, you will generally find that bright, clean, hard, well-shaped mature onions with dry skins are of good quality. Avoid any that have begun to sprout, or in which the seed-stem has developed, or that show signs of rot, especially if they are moist at the neck. Some onions may have a brown stain on the outer skin. This does not necessarily mean they are injured if they are hard and dry. Much of the stain will disappear when you peel off the outer layers. Misshapen onions are sometimes wasteful to prepare, but otherwise entirely edible.

The larger onions are very good stuffed with a mixture of bread crumbs, nuts, celery and seasonings, after a preliminary cooking to make them tender. They may also be baked whole, or cut up and scalloped or creamed. The smaller sized onions, often brown skinned, are what most women choose to season dishes like meat loaf, milk-vegetable soups, or hash, because one onion when minced is just about right in proportion to the other ingredients. However, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, in its forecast of the crop, says that large-sized onions will be more plentiful this fall than smaller ones, and that the spread in price is disappearing. If you are cutting part of a large onion for seasoning, wrap the cut piece in waxed paper and it will keep for a day or two in a cool place. Don't put it into the refrigerator, though, or it will lend its "aroma" to other foods. Unless, of course, you put it in a covered jar.

When you want to introduce onion flavor into a soup or sauce, the standard method is to cook a tablespoon or more of chopped onion in the butter or other fat until it is tender and transparent, then stir in the flour, and finally the liquid, and cook until the raw starch flavor disappears. Cooking the onion in fat before it is used in any mixture gives a richer, better flavor.

Now let's list some of the good dishes we can make with onions. High on the list my own choice would place onion soup. First I'd cook sliced onions, plenty of them in fat until they turn yellow. Then I'd add meat broth and simmer slowly until the onions are tender and the soup is the right consistency to serve. How many onions? Oh, about one medium-sized or two small onions -- or half a large one, -- for each person. When I send this soup to the table I put a slice of toast in each soup plate, generously sprinkled with grated cheese. I like a drop of tabasco sauce to season the cheese.

Have you ever tried French fried onions? Slice large mild onions crosswise, about a third of an inch thick, and separate the rings. Dip these in a thin batter, and fry like potato chips in deep fat. If there are any left over, you can keep them crisp for several days in a container with a tight lid.

Since forequarter cuts of lamb are reasonable in price just now, we might plan a menu based on roast breast of lamb with large baked onions stuffed with "forcemeat", utilizing the lean trimmed from the foreshank. To cook the onions, cut them crosswise in half and simmer in lightly salted water until about half done. Lift the onions out, and arrange in a buttered baking dish. Remove the centers without disturbing the outer layers. Chop them and add to the forcemeat stuffing. By forcemeat, of course, I mean a mixture of the ground lean meat, fine bread crumbs, celery and parsley, well seasoned. You also stuff the roast with it. Fill the onion shells with the forcemeat mixture, cover, and bake for about half an hour or until the onions are tender. Remove the cover during the last of the cooking so the onions will brown on top.

To serve with this roast stuffed breast of lamb and stuffed onions, how would you like quick cooked spinach, kale or broccoli, or some other green vegetable, and maybe strips of raw carrot or crisp celery as the relish? Then for dessert, baked pears or baked apples and ginger cookies or hot gingerbread slipped into the oven as you took the roast out.

