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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, October 30, 1941.

QUESTION BOX

Food value of tangerines?
How wrap smoked ham?
How keep flowering potted plants
in winter?

Answers from various scientists in the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Question and answer day often reminds one of those old-fashioned parties that ended up with a "grab-bag". You reached into the bag, sight unseen, and sometimes pulled out a very useful and attractive prize. Our mailbag is like that, practically all the time, because the answers to the questions, given by scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture generally contain valuable new information.

Take our first query today: A mother writes: "My children are very fond of tangerines. They call them 'kid-glove' oranges, because they peel so easily. But they are small and sometimes not as juicy as ordinary oranges. What about their food value? In other words, are they a good buy?"

The scientists have some surprising news for all of us in answer to this question. They say that tangerines--that is, mandarin-type oranges,--are exceptionally rich in provitamin A. In fact they have about three times as much "provitamin A" in their pulp and juice as sweet or juice oranges. In case that's a new term to you, here's the way the scientists explain it:

The material which creates caroty color in oranges and other yellow foods is called "carotenoid pigment." It is known that this yellow-colored pigment contains something that helps the human body to make vitamin A. So they call this substance "provitamin A."

Some of the early and midseason varieties of Florida sweet oranges gradually increase in orange color from September to March, and late Valencias increase in

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color up to February or March, and then have less. Their value as a source of provitamin A increases and decreases accordingly. But throughout the season mandarin types of oranges-- tangerines, Satsumas, and mandarins,-- have much more carrot color and consequently are much richer in provitamin A. For this reason you can encourage your children to eat them freely.

However, don't leave out the juice oranges. All oranges are extra good sources of vitamin C, as you know, but the sweet juice oranges provide relatively more of vitamin C than do mandarin-type oranges. So give the tangerines in addition to the regular supply of oranges and other citrus fruits.

Our next question is also on food, but it concerns food storage. A farm woman asks: "What is the best way to wrap our hams after they are smoked? We have had trouble with skippers and spoilage some years."

Meat specialists of the Department of Agriculture helped us on that question. They have studied the storage of home cured hams over a three-year period. They have looked into all the time-honored, traditional methods, such as coating hams with pepper and molasses, burying them in rock salt or wood ashes, or coating with paraffin or wrapping and bagging. This last way of storing a ham is best under most conditions, they say.

Wrap the smoked meat in parchment paper and then in fly-proof muslin bags, say the scientists. This method prevents the flies that have their larval stage as "skippers" from reaching the hams and laying eggs on them. It also excludes part of the air and light that make the fat get rancid. You can paint the bags with a yellow wash as an extra precaution against skippers. In dry climates smoked meat can be stored in the grain bin, but it develops a musty flavor where the humidity is high.

If you see mold on the outside surface of a ham after long storage it doesn't mean that the ham has spoiled. The mold is partly due to hot damp weather and you can usually wipe it off or trim it off.

Perhaps you'd like a good curing formula for hams and shoulders. Use a dry curing mixture made up of 8 pounds of salt, 2 pounds of brown sugar, and 2 ounces of saltpeter for each 100 pounds of meat. Cure the meat at a temperature of about 38 degrees Fahrenheit, allowing 3 days' curing time for each pound of weight of the average ham. Bacon takes a milder cure. At the end of the time wash the hams, dry them overnight, and smoke them for 2 or 3 days. Don't let the temperature of the smokehouse go over 110 degrees. And don't wrap or pack the hams until they have cooled to air temperature after you take them out of the smokehouse.

Well, to make a bad pun, that's good meaty information. Our next question brings an answer from plant scientists that may possible disappoint some of you.

This is the question. "What are the best flowering potted plants to buy so as to have blooms indoors all winter, and how should I take care of them?"

And the Department of Agriculture plant men say you'll be wise to regard most flowering potted plants from florists or greenhouses about the same as cut flowers. So there's no "best" plant to recommend. Several will bloom through quite a long season. Some of these are Begonias, Cyclamen, African Violets, and geraniums. When the blooms are gone, on such plants as primroses, cinerarias, poinsettias, lilies, and others, the plants are not likely to bloom again and might as well be discarded. Some of them can be kept in a dormant state until spring.

The plant scientists explain that the whole life of many potted plants has been adapted to greenhouse conditions. You cannot give them these conditions in an ordinary home. And some of the plants, like poinsettia and winter lilies have been "timed" for a special season and will seldom bloom any more.

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