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# homemakers' chat

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Thursday, March 30, 1944.

## QUESTION BOX

- Vitamin value of strawberries?
- How can asparagus?
- How save fuel in cooking?

## ANSWERS FROM:

Scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

Strawberries and asparagus come to our markets about the same time, so it's not surprising to find questions on both these foods in today's mail bag. Then there's a question on saving fuel in cooking. Home economists and plant scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture supply the answers to these questions. Let's read the first letter.

"Does it make any difference in the vitamin value of strawberries if I wash and hull them in the morning and then keep them in the refrigerator until dinner time? Or should I prepare them just before the meal?"

Strawberries lose vitamin C rapidly when they are without their caps any length of time. So the plant scientists say that if you hull them early in the morning and then set them aside all day, or even for several hours, they may lose considerable vitamin C.

Studies made to find out how well strawberries and other berries keep their vitamins under ordinary market handling show that strawberries hold most of their vitamin C for 2 or 3 days after picking if they are kept at low temperatures and are not bruised. In these studies the plant scientists tried bruising the berries, capping them, and slicing them before they stored them. When they did any of these things, the berries lost 10 to 20 percent of their vitamin C in one day, and almost all of it after two days at room temperature. The oxygen in the air destroys vitamin C, and when berries are bruised, capped or cut, the oxygen in the air reaches the tissues of the fruit and destroys vitamin C more rapidly than when the berries are whole.

So if you want all the vitamin values in strawberries, buy fresh berries,



that have not been bruised, handle the berries gently so as not to break the skin or bruise them,---keep them as cold as possible until served---use the berries as soon as you can after you buy or pick them---and don't hull them until shortly before you are ready to serve them. Incidentally, wash them with their caps on, lifting them gently, a few at a time, from a bowl. Then the sand can sink to the bottom. Don't let them soak long in the water. After washing, cap them, sweeten them, sweeten them if they need it, and serve promptly.

Now for a question on canning asparagus. "We have recently moved to a suburban house with a garden and an asparagus bed. I'd like to can some of this asparagus. Please give the correct method."

Asparagus is no vegetable to take chances with, the home economists say. You need a steam pressure canner---your own or a borrowed one---to put up asparagus safely. And use only very fresh tender stalks from the asparagus patch.

Here are the canning directions: If the stalks are at all gritty, scrape off the side scales where the grit sometimes lodges. Then cut the tender part of the asparagus into inch lengths to pack it more closely and serve it more economically later on. Wash thoroughly, but gently, so as not to break the tips. Put the pieces in enough boiling water to cover, and boil for 2 or 3 minutes.

The next step is to pack the asparagus, boiling hot, into the containers. Cover with the hot liquid in which you boiled the asparagus, and add one teaspoonful of salt to each quart. Adjust the lids of the jars according to directions for the type of jar you are using. Process quart size glass jars 40 minutes, pints 35 minutes, at 10 pounds pressure, or 240 degrees Fahrenheit.

Next, a fuel-saving question. "My gas bills seem higher than other people's. I don't feel that I am doing all I could to use gas economically. Can you give a few 'do's and 'don'ts' to help me?"

The home equipment specialists of the U.S. Department Agriculture have a number of fuel saving tips, which boil down to one main idea---use the least possible fuel to get the desired result, whether you boil, bake, simmer, or fry a food.





Don't turn on a surface burner or unit until you are ready to set a saucepan over it. Surface burners don't need preheating. And turn off the heat when the food is done and you take the pan off the stove. You may have to preheat the oven, but if you use an oven thermometer and make a few tests yourself, you can easily tell how long beforehand to light the oven burner. For some foods no preheating is necessary.

You waste fuel on top cooking burners if the bottoms of your pans are smaller than the gas burner or electric unit. Some of the heat goes up around the outside of the pan and is lost. On the other hand, if the bottom of the pan is much larger than the burner the heat won't spread evenly to the outer edges. The most efficient pans or kettles have straight sides, flat bottoms, and tightly fitting lids. Bring food to a boil on high heat, and then turn the burner down to the lowest point at which the water will boil or simmer. That's the gas-saving trick most inexperienced cooks need to learn.

Notice about how long it takes to cook the quantity of food you expect to serve, and instead of lifting lids to see if the food is done, watch the clock. Don't waste oven heat, either, by "peeping."

When you bake one thing in the oven, plan to bake other foods at the same time if you can use the same temperature for each, and if both are moist or both are dry foods. Don't overcrowd the oven, as that tends to cause uneven heating, and may throw your temperature off.

Don't heat up a whole kettleful of water when you need only a pint or so. As soon as the kettle boils, turn the heat down. Don't start heating water for tea or coffee or other cooking until you are almost ready to use it.

Most range manufacturers give you a number of other tips on conserving heat on their particular models. If you do not have these directions for your range, write to the manufacturer.

