

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, January 17, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BEVERAGES AND THEIR LABELS." Part II. Items of interest to women, from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Here we are, friends, with the second report on "Beverages and Their Labels."

Last week our Washington reporter defined for us such popular beverages as grape juice, orange juice, orangeade, lemonade, grapeade, and so forth.

Today, we'll learn about carbonated beverages, and how they should be labeled under the Federal Food and Drugs Act. Quoting directly, our correspondent writes:

"Ginger ale is first on my list. Do you know what it's made of? Of course a good many people can take their ginger ale without knowing what it's made of--and be quite happy about it. Others, endowed with more curiosity, like to know the composition of their food and drink. So, for these curious ones, I'll explain that ginger ale, under the Federal Food and Drugs Act--is the carbonated beverage prepared from ginger ale flavor, harmless organic acid, water, and a sirup of one or more of the following: Sugar, invert sugar, dextrose; with or without the addition of caramel color.

"Now this definition may bring up the question: What is ginger ale flavor? Some people will be quite satisfied with the knowledge that ginger ale flavor is simply--the flavor of ginger ale. Others will be interested to know that, under the Food and Drugs Act, ginger ale flavor is the beverage flavor in which ginger is the essential constituent, with or without aromatic and pungent ingredients, citrus oils, fruit juices, and caramel color.

"So much for ginger ale. I might go on, and define other popular drinks--sarsaparilla, root beer, birch beer, cream soda water . . . Also, I might define sarsaparilla flavor, and birch-beer flavor. You might say--especially if you're not especially interested--you might say that sarsaparilla flavor is simply the flavor of sarsaparilla and let it go at that. But that would only intrigue your more curious friends. They'd demand to know more about sarsaparilla. Is it animal, mineral, or vegetable?



"Well, just to satisfy everybody, here's the official definition: 'Sarsaparilla flavor is the beverage flavor prepared from oil of sassafras and methyl salicylate (or oil of wintergreen or oil of sweet birch), with or without other aromatic and flavoring substances and caramel color. It derives its characteristic flavor from oil of sassafras and methyl salicylate.' Chemically oil of wintergreen and oil of sweet birch consist almost entirely of natural methyl salicylate.

"Now, birch-beer flavor. And here's something queer. Birch-beer flavor, like sarsaparilla flavor, is made up of methyl salicylate (or oil of sweet birch or oil of wintergreen) and oil of sassafras. However, in birch-beer flavor, the methyl salicylate predominates.

"But that's enough about the carbonated beverages. Now the imitations. How can you tell whether a beverage you buy is an imitation or the real thing?

"Here's how you can tell. Under the Food and Drugs Act an imitation shall bear on the label the word 'imitation,' and also a clear statement of the principal or essential ingredients. The word 'imitation' should directly precede, and be displayed with the same prominence, as the word it modifies. Here's a sample label with appropriate wording and arrangement, for a typical imitation fruit beverage:

BLANK BRAND  
IMITATION GRAPE  
BEVERAGE BASE  
Artificially flavored and colored  
with added tartaric acid  
1 GALLON

"That's plain enough, is it not? And furthermore--so as not to mislead people who look at pictures but do not read labels, such an imitation beverage should not bear a design of grapes, or other fruit on its label.

"Now what about artificial color? Is it legal to use such artificial color or 'cloud' as starch, insoluble gums, ground rind, excess pulp, and so forth, to hide a deficiency of fruit juice, or to hide other inferiority? Answer: Such use of artificial color is an adulteration, under the Federal Food and Drugs Act, and therefore prohibited.

"But some well-informed person may bring up the fact that certain harmless coal-tar dyes are used in beverages, and legally, too. He knows, because he has seen beverages--and foods--with these words on the label: 'Certified Color added.'

"Our well-informed friend is right about that. Certain coal-tar dyes may be used in beverages and other food, provided their use does not result in concealing damage or inferiority, and provided their presence is declared on the label. The words 'Certified Color Added' may be used only when the color added is taken directly from a package of a certified batch of color, or color mixture. The certified colors include four red shades, one orange shade, five yellow shades, three green, and two blue shades."

This concludes our reports on beverages and their labels, for the time being. I'll add a postscript to our Washington letter. That is--State laws may contain additional requirements for the labeling of beverages, or requirements different from those established by the Food and Drug Administration

