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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, December 4, 1941.

QUESTION BOX

How curtain tall windows?
How make soap at home?
How make sour cream?

ANSWERS FROM:

Home economists, chemists,
and dairy specialists of the
U.S. Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

Our Thursday question-box turns up inquiries today about curtaining tall windows, making soap at home, and making good-flavored sour cream. As usual, we've consulted scientists in the U. S. Department of Agriculture to get the answers.

Let's begin with that curtain problem. An Indiana housewife writes: "I have bought a country house which has high ceilings and long narrow windows. I have the job of making the drapes. Can you suggest any way to make these curtains so the room and windows won't look so high? I can't use expensive material, but I do want the curtains attractive."

The home economists say you can easily make those tall narrow windows appear wider and shorter. Attach a piece of board 9 to 12 inches long at right angles to each upper outside corner of the window frames. Then mount the drapery fixtures on these boards instead of on the window frames. That will make the draperies cover the wall and window frame and leave all the glass uncovered. In other words, extending the apparent width of the window makes it look shorter.

If you have 2 windows close together or separated by a narrow strip of wall, curtain them as one. Or hang the draperies out over the wall rather than in over the window. You could cover the strip of wall between the windows with mirror glass, or paper or paint it to match the window frame. Then hang 2 or 3 glass shelves in the space. Put pots of ivy or other vines or interesting colored objects on these shelves. The effect will be to add a horizontal note and bring the ceiling down a little closer to the floor.

As to materials, you can get many very attractive, inexpensive fabrics with crosswise stripes to break the up-and-down appearance of the rooms. And for good balance, carry out the horizontal effect on the wall opposite the window or windows. If there is an open doorway on that wall, you could hang draperies in the opening to match those at the windows. If there is a mantelpiece, a rectangular mirror hung above it with its length parallel to the floor will add horizontal lines.

So much for interior decoration. Now for a question about soap. "Does it pay to save cooking fats and make them into soap? If so, please give directions."

Both chemists and home economists agree that it definitely does pay for most households to prevent waste of any fats, and to make soap out of those that are no longer good for cooking purposes. Here are a few tips in addition to those given on lye cans:

To have the fat as pure as possible, melt it in an equal volume of hot water. Stir the mixture for a few minutes, then cool until the grease has solidified so you can take it off the top of the water. Impurities, including the salt in bacon and ham fat, will sink to the bottom or dissolve. You will need an iron kettle for soap making. Never use aluminum--the lye will ruin it. Weigh out 2 and a half pounds of the clarified fat for each 5 and a half ounce can of soda lye. Heat the fat in the iron kettle until it is completely melted. Then set it off the stove to cool, while you dissolve your lye in twice as much water by measure. For a 5-1/2 ounce can of lye, that's 11 ounces of water. Use another iron pan for this, and stir with a wooden paddle or spoon. As soon as the lye is dissolved, mix the solution thoroughly with the lukewarm melted fat. Heat, stir out all lumps, and then add another 5-1/2 ounces of water. Stir until it is all blended with the soap, and immediately pour the mixture into a cardboard box of suitable size. When the soap has stood 24 hours, you can turn it out and cut it into cakes, but let the cakes harden a week or more in a clean, dry place, away from direct sunlight, before you use them or store them.

Next we have a question about sour cream. "In our family we like to use sour cream for cakes, muffins, and cookies, and for making sour cream gravy. But when we let sweet cream sour naturally it sometimes gets a disagreeable off-flavor. Can you tell us how dairies make their sour cream?"

Commercial milk dealers sour sweet cream with a "starter" to have sour cream of uniform quality, dairy specialists say. You can easily do the same. Buttermilk adds a large number of active milk-souring bacteria to the cream. And these not only sour the cream quickly, but they also help to prevent the growth of other bacteria which give cream undesirable flavor or odor. Be sure to use only buttermilk with a clean flavor. Commercial buttermilk is more reliable for this purpose than buttermilk from farm churning.

Here's how to make the cream sour: Stir up the bottle of sweet cream, which may be either heavy cream or thinner coffee cream. Pour about half the cream into a clean bottle. For each pint of cream you'll need about 5 teaspoons of fresh buttermilk, shaken up before you measure it. Add the buttermilk to the half bottle of cream. Pour back enough cream to fill the bottle up to three-fourths of an inch from the top. Stopper the bottle, shake well, set in a warm place (70 to 85 degrees) for 24 hours, and you'll have the kind of sour cream you like. It's even better if you keep it in the refrigerator for another day. In cold weather use more buttermilk or hold the cream 12 to 24 hours longer.

And now we'll take leave of you until our next question and answer day.

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