homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, July 24, 1941

QUESTION BOX

Where get information on drying?
Are paper gaskets all right?
Why chicken spoils easily?
How substitute cocoa for chocolate?

ANSWERS FROM

horticulturists and home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Drying is an old-fashioned method of preserving some of the garden products, mentioned along with canning and storing fruits and vegetables to prevent them from going to waste this summer. So our question box today contains some very appropria queries, particularly the first one, which is about drying. Then there's a canning question, one about keeping cooked chicken, and another about cocoa.

The drying question is from a woman who says she has Winesap and Delicious apple trees in her garden, also a peach tree, and a Kieffer pear tree. She would like to try drying some of these fruits instead of canning them, because her supply of jars is low. And she'd like to dry some vegetables, too. She asks where to get detailed information on drying.

That's easy to answer. From the U. S. Department of Agriculture. During the first World War, people did lots of drying, and Farmers' Bulletin 984 was written to help them. This bulletin has been revised and brought up to date, and any one interested can get a copy by writing to the Department. The first thing this writer will find out when she reads it is that she cannot hope to dry everything that grows in her garden. For example, she can dry her Winesap and Delicious apples, and any other good cooking varieties very easily. Before she tries to dry Kieffer pears, she should store them and ripen them. This must be done also when Kieffer pears are canned. She can dry peaches and berries and several other fruits. Among the vegetables, sweet corn, mature peas and beans, pumpkin and squash dry well

under home conditions. But generally speaking, it's better to store any vegetable that can be stored, and to can the tender young green vegetables like snap beans, spinach, or new peas. The "drying bulletin" gives the pros and cons of drying most common garden products. It also tells just how to make an inexpensive, practical home drier for the top of the cookstove. And how to keep dried products properly after you've dried them.

I'll repeat that number--Farmers' Bulletin 984-Farm and Home Drying of Fruits and Vegetables. It's free while the present supply lasts.

Next question: "Is it alright to use tin cans with paper gaskets, or should they always be made of rubber?"

Either is alright. It depends on the kind of sealing machine you have and the care with which you operate this machine. The paper gasket generally is recommended in home canning because it is a little more bulky and more completely fills the seam made by hand-sealing machines. Paper gaskets also make a better seal when you use reflanged tin cans. However, you have to be very careful to keep paper gaskets dry. And occasionally you may find that one of the paper gaskets drops out of the cover--or it may wrinkle if it gets wet or isn't adjusted right--thus causing a faulty seal.

The gasket on the tin can--whether it is of rubber or paper composition--is just under the rim of the lid. This gasket helps to make the seal airtight. The sealing machine folds this gasket into a double seam between the can and the lid.

Now for a question on preventing waste through spoilage. "Is it true that chicken will spoil more quickly if it is cooked in a kettle with the lid left on?"

No. What usually makes chicken or chicken broth spoil is letting it stand around in a warm room or in a warm spot for some time after it is cooked. Warm chicken broth is just about a perfect medium for spoilage bacteria to grow and thrive in.

To keep chicken from spoiling, cool it off as quickly as you can after it is thoroughly cooked. Naturally, it will cool off more quickly if you leave the lid off the pan. After the chicken cools, store it in a refrigerator or another cold place until you are ready to use it. Preferably in the coolest part of the refrigerator, like other meats, or milk. And don't wait too long to use it.

There's another reason, though, for not covering chicken tightly when you're cooking it. If you don't cover it tightly, it's easier to keep the temperature of the water at simmering rather than boiling. The temperature of boiling water is too high to cook chicken in, because high temperatures toughen and harden the protein of the meat.

Most people make a cake occasionally, even in the hot months, and here's a baking question, answered by the home economists. "When I bake, sometimes I have no chocolate in the house when I need it. If I use cocoa instead of chocolate, how much should I use?"

One-fourth cup of cocoa for every ounce of chocolate called for in your recipe. You'll probably want to add a little fat, too, when you use cocoa instead of chocolate, because chocolate has some fat in it. Add about one-half tablespoon of some well-flavored fat along with every fourth cup of cocoa you use in cakes or cookies.

And speaking of chocolate, when the children want cold chocolate-milk drinks in summer-time, of course you can use cocoa, which is less rich and therefore more desirable for them in hot weather. Of course--at any season of the year--it's a good idea to use cocoa or chocolate sparingly in making drinks for children, because of the stimulating effect these products have on the nervous system.

That was the last number in today's question box. More questions and answers next Tuesday.

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