homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, Feb. 19, 1942

QUESTION BOX
How grow tomatoes from seed?
What fabric for coat lining?
How finish seams in coat without a lining?

ANSWERS FROM
plant scientists and home economists of the
U.S. Department of Agriculture

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The letters this week are all from homemakers interested in doing their bit for their country by raising some of their own food and making some of the clothing for the family. Answers to these letters come from scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The first question is about growing tomatoes -- something almost everyone with a home garden will want to do this year. This letter says: "We would like to have our own tomatoes to eat at the earliest possible date instead of buying them. Last year we bought young tomato plants, but my daughter thinks we could grow our own plants from seed. Is it practical to start tomatoes from seed in the house?"

Plant scientists reply that it's easier, of course, to begin with plants already well started, but there's no reason why you can't raise your own plants from seed if you have the equipment. Remember though that seed is precious this year. Select it with care and plant it sparingly. Two small packages of tomato seed, one of an early variety and one of a late variety will produce enough plants for several family gardens.

You might share your seeds with neighbors, or start plants for your neighborhood. Perhaps you could trade tomato plants for something your neighbors have that you need. If you can't use one package of tomato seed to best advantage

this way, better store the leftover seeds in a ventilated tin or glass jar to protect them from mice until you are ready to start your second crop.

Now about planting the seeds. You can plant them in quart berry boxes, in paper drinking cups with the bottom taken out, or in shallow wooden "flats" 4 or 5 inches apart in each direction so you can move the plants later with a good ball of earth around them.

As for the soil to use, any moist, fertile, finely sifted garden soil is right for starting tomato seeds. Fill the containers with the sifted soil and place them in a window box or tray, somewhere where the temperature stays about 70 degrees, and where you can turn the box to give all sides equal sunlight. Sow your seeds sparingly--only a few to a pot or box.

These young plants will need transplanting twice. The first transplanting is from the house to the cold frame where on bright sunny days you gradually condition them to outdoors air. The second transplanting is to the open ground when danger of frost is past. The plants grown from seed will come up in about 8 or 10 days. You will need to transplant the seedlings to the cold frame in about 2 weeks after you sow the seed. Then, in about 6 weeks more, the young plants in the cold frame will be in condition to set out in their permanent place in the garden.

Later crops of tomatoes you can grow without transplanting, but wait until the weather is settled enough to plant seeds directly in the ground.

You can get full information about raising your own tomatoes from a free bulletin published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Write to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. and ask for a bulletin called "The Farm Garden." If you want to order by number, ask for Farmers' Bulletin 1673.

If you plan to raise your own plants, another bulletin you might find helpful is the one on hot beds and cold frames. Send a postcard to the U.S. Department

of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. for "Hot Beds and Cold Frames," Farmers' Bulletin 1743.

Now from questions about raising tomatoes, let's turn to questions about making clothes. A couple of letters here bring up problems of making spring coats.

The first question is: "What kind of fabric can I use instead of silk for the lining of a coat?"

Clothing experts of the Department of Agriculture suggest that rayon makes a durable, good-looking lining for a sports or tailored type of coat. You can us rayon crepe, or rayon satin, or rayon with a twill weave. Smooth mercerized cotto also make good-looking and long-lasting linings, especially for coats of cotton, or rayon. Soft corduroy and some other lightweight fabrics need a lining to give them body enough to hang well. And you must line white coats of lightweight material so the colors won't show through when you wear them over dark colored dresses. On the other hand, if you plan to launder the coat you are making, you won't want a lining in it. A lined coat is hard to iron after laundering.

So much for fabrics. Now a question about finishing the seams in a coat with no lining. A homemaker says: "What's the best way to finish the seams in a coat without a lining?"

The clothing experts say the right finish depends a good deal on the material the coat is made of. In a wool coat bind the edges of the seams with silk bias binding in a color that matches the coat. But on wool knit material make the seam edges firm with blanket stitch. If your coat is made of cotton or rayon, you can turn the edges of the seam back and stitch them. If the material is too thick for this, bind the edges with cotton binding.

That's all the questions today.

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