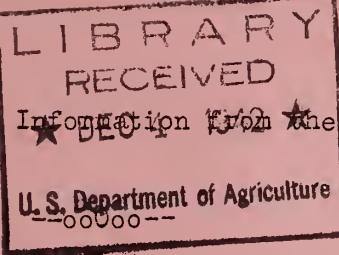


Monday, October 12, 1942

Bureau of Plant Industry,



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In 3Hh

SUBJECT: "BEDTIME FOR LATE CROPS."
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

A bedtime story from the horticulturists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture--that's what you are about to hear. This story is especially for home gardeners and housewives. It's about putting late garden crops--vegetables and some fruits--to bed for the winter. You are probably accustomed to talking about "storing" vegetables or "keeping" them in cellars or outdoor pits for use during the cold weather. The scientists explain that storing or keeping is really "sleeping" your crops. As long as the vegetables keep in storage, they are alive though in a dormant of sleeping condition. If they start to grow they are waking up and won't keep. When they wilt and shrivel, or decay, they are dying or dead. So your aim is to keep them alive and healthy--to put them to bed in such a way that their sleep will be "sweet and sound."

To begin with, of course, you only want to give sleeping room to crops able to sleep well. Tender, juicy, very delicate vegetables and fruits are naturally not the sound sleepers that the firmer, sturdier, drier vegetables are. And the late varieties sleep better than the early varieties--late cabbage, late carrots, beets, onions, winter squash, winter radishes and winter pears and apples--they are the varieties to choose for storage.

Beside variety there's age to consider in choosing your winter roomers. Crops that are young, tender, and immature won't keep long. And crops that are too old and tough are not worth trying to keep. Give your sleeping space only to mature vegetables in prime condition. And be sure they are healthy before you tuck them in

and say good-night. Store only those with no signs of disease or decay, no bruises, no open breaks or cuts in the skin. Decay starts at such places. Be sure the crops have no frost bites either. If Jack Frost reached them before you did, they won't keep long. Handle fruits and vegetables with care as you get them ready for bed to avoid bruising. And handle them when they are dry, not when they are wet with rain or dew.

So much for the crops you choose for putting in for the winter. Now about sleeping quarters for them. Fruits and vegetables have some of the same sleeping needs that you yourself do. For one thing, they need ventilation in the bedroom. A good storage cellar has at least one window, and preferably two for cross ventilation. Even an outdoor storage pit needs an opening to the outside. You see vegetables breathe as they sleep, they take in oxygen, and give off gases and odors. If they can't get air or if these gases can't escape, they decay faster. Ventilation not only keeps the air fresh around the sleeping crops; it also helps keep the air properly cool and moist. (More about that later.)

Darkness also helps sound sleep. Darkness is especially important for potatoes. They turn green and take on an unpleasant taste in too much light. So have blinds at the windows or some other means of cutting off light.

Cleanliness is also important for healthy sleep. Once a year a cellar storage room needs thorough cleaning. If possible whitewash the storage room each year before putting in the vegetables. And all during the time crops are stored there keep the room clean and remove any vegetables that start to rot. Keep the storage room free of mice and rats, too. These pests do more damage to sleeping vegetables than to sleeping human beings. Tight screens at windows and door will keep them out. Foundation walls that go 2 feet down in the earth will keep them from burrowing in.

Then there's the question of congenial bedfellows. Some crops don't get along well with some others. Apples and celery, for example, sleeping in the room

with root vegetables absorb odors and take on an unpleasant earthy taste. Celery gives apples and pears a celery flavor. And apples and pears give off a gas that makes other crops ripen and then decay.

Beside ventilation, darkness, cleanliness and congenial company, two other very important requirements for good sleep are temperature and moisture. You know how it is with human beings. Some sleep best in a warm room, others in a cold room. So with fruits and vegetables. Some sleep best where it is cold and moist; others where it is cool and not so moist; some where it is warm and dry; others where it is cold and dry.

The crops that like it cold and moist are: cabbage, beets, carrots, parsnips, salsify, turnips, rutabagas, winter radishes, celery, apples and pears. Many of these--beets and carrots, for example--keep best down on the damp earth floor of the storage room.

Potatoes keep best for cooking in a part of the cellar where it is not so cold and not so moist. Keep them at a temperature between 50 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Below 36 or so, potatoes become sweet.

Another group of vegetables like to sleep where it is warm and dry. These are dry beans, squash, and pumpkins. They keep well in a warm furnace room in the basement or a shelf near the kitchen stove. Sweetpotatoes sleep best at a temperature of 55 to 60 with enough moisture so they won't shrivel.

As for onions, the attic makes good quarters for them because they prefer it cold and dry--but they shouldn't freeze.

Farm families with outdoor storage pits or cellars may well keep the "fragrant" vegetables out there. Cabbage and turnips down cellar often send their fragrance from the basement to the upstairs rooms.

These few notes from the scientists may help you provide your garden crops with healthy sleep. You can get more information from the bulletin on home storage, called "Home Storage of Vegetables," No. 879, free from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

