homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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QUESTION BOX

Too soft dough for refrigerator cookies
Cooking with limes
Hard water and pale beets
Pan squash to save food value
Bread from rolled oats

Answers from home economists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

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Questions about food fill the mailbag again this week. Here waiting for answers are letters asking about ice-box cookies; cooking with limes; beets that turn pale; summer squash and oatmeal bread.

The first letter comes from a lady who's been having trouble making refrigerator cookies in the hot weather. She writes: "I'M having trouble with my favorite recipe for ice-box cookies and I can't understand why. I used this recipe with success all last winter. But this summer I have found the mixture too soft to handle and mold into shape. I have used exactly the same ingredients; measured them and mixed them in exactly the same way. Can you tell me what has made the change in the mixture?"

"The weather" is the answer suggested by cookery specialists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Refrigerator cookies usually contain a good deal of fat--more fat than the ordinary cookies you roll out. In hot weather the fat gets very soft and may make the dough too soft to handle. A simple way to avoid this trouble is to put the bowl of dough in the refrigerator as soon as you have mixed the cookies. In a few minutes the mixture will begin to get firm. Then you can mold the dough easily, roll it in paper, and put it back in the refrigerator to get very firm before you slice it for baking.

Now for the second question. This is a question about that refreshing citrus fruit--the lime. The letter says: "Is it possible to use limes in cooking as you

do lemons?"

Again the answer comes from cooking specialists of the Department of Agriculture. They say you can substitute limes for lemons in a great many dessert recipes. In Florida, which is the lime-producing center of the Nation, a favorite dessert is lime chiffon pie. You make it just as you make lemon chiffon pie. Other excellent lime desserts are: lime gelatin sponge with custard sauce; lime filling for cake; frozen lime ice or lime sherbet.

Limeade is a best seller at soda fountains in many parts of the United States all summer. Cooking specialists suggest that sweetened lime juice combines very well with chilled ginger ale for a refreshing summer beverage. Lime juice is also excellent in French dressing for fruit salad or avocado salad. A dash of lime tones up a honeydew melon, too.

Let's proceed now to Question No. 3. A bride writes: "My husband complains because the beets I cook are always pale instead of the rich red color he likes. I follow the recipes for cooking beets exactly, so I can't understand why they lose color. We have very hard water. Could that have anything to do with it?"

Hard water may cause the beet color to fade. But you can save the color by putting a little acid in the cooking water. Use vinegar or cream of tartar. Or bring back the red after the beets are cooked by serving them with a sauce containing vinegar.

Since you follow a recipe for cooking beets, you probably know that beets need to be cooked whole without peeling and paring so the red color will not bleed away in cooking. Leave the skins on the beets, the roots also, and about two inches of stem. When the beets have cooked tender, drain off the water, and slip the skins, and roots, and stems off with your fingers.

Now for a question about cooking summer squash. A housewife asks how to cook tender young squash to save flavor and food value.

The answer is: Pan it. Wash the squash and cut out any imperfections. Slice it or cut in pieces. Put it in a saucepan with a little melted butter or other fat but no water. Cover the pan and cook 5 or 8 minutes at medium heat. Season and serve.

Now here's a letter from a lady whose mother came from Scotland. She says: "My mother used to make delicious oatmeal bread years ago, but her recipe has long since been lost. I am wondering if it is still possible to make yeast bread of oatmeal with modern flours and yeast preparations and so on."

The answer is: Yes. You can make very good oatmeal bread using finely ground rolled oats with about 3 times as much white flour and using compressed yeast. Here is the recipe for oatmeal bread from the U.S. Department of Agriculture: 3 cups of finely ground rolled oats.....9 cups sifted all-purpose flour..... 3 and a half cups of milk.....1 to 2 cakes compressed yeast.....4 tablespoons of sugar.....4 teaspoons of salt.....and 2 tablespoons of fat. Mix the rolled oats with the white flour and proceed as for white bread. This recipe will make 4 pound-loaves of bread.

That's all the questions and answers today. More coming up on Thursday.

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