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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, March 19, 1942

QUESTION BOX

- : Saving with slip covers? :
- : Which spring greens best? :
- : Peanut oil in salads? :
- : Why eggs thicken liquids? :

ANSWERS FROM

Home economists of
the U. S. Department
of Agriculture

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Foods and furnishings are the chief topics in today's batch of questions. As usual, the answers are from home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Let's begin with a question on making slip covers. This homemaker writes:

"I am wondering if it would be economy, or unpatriotic extravagance in wartime for me to make slip covers for the living-room chairs and sofa. Our furniture is quite nice. Wouldn't slip covers keep it that way?"

Saving your nice furniture and making it last as long as possible by using slip covers is certainly a wise economy, the home economists say. And if you make the slip covers out of one of the many durable cotton fabrics you will not be using a scarce or restricted material. There is plenty of cotton, and it's relatively inexpensive, so your covers need not cost much if you make them yourself.

Incidentally, you are welcome to a free bulletin on slip covers. (The number is 1873-F). You can get a copy simply by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture for it. The bulletin tells about a dozen or more cotton fabrics that make good slip covers, and tells how to estimate the yardage; how to allow for figured patterns; and many other points that help you turn out a trim, tailored job. There are plenty of how-to-do-it pictures, too.

From slip covers, we turn to several food questions. The first is about peanut oil. "Is peanut oil good for salad dressings? It's new to me."

Yes, indeed, food scientists consider peanut oil fine in a salad dressing. The new Food-for-Freedom goals for 1942 call for increased production of all domestic fats and oils. You'll probably see more peanut oil on the market as time goes on. It's a good oil for frying, especially for frying potato chips, and other fried foods that are served cold, the home economists report. Peanut oil gives a special luster to fried products served cold. Peanut and other vegetable oils are also useful for greasing cake and bread tins economically, because they form a continuous film on the pan.

The next food question is about spring greens. "Which are the best greens to serve in the springtime?"

It would be hard to pick out any one kind of greens and say it was the "best". The nutritionists say all leafy green vegetables are rich in both iron and vitamin A. The thinner and greener the leaf, the richer they are in both. Many greens also are rich in calcium, and contain considerable amounts of vitamin C and vitamin B-one. And, of course, they furnish bulk or roughage, which most people need.

So serve as many leafy green vegetables as you can. Many wild plants that will be weeds later on are good greens in the spring while they are young, tender, and delicate in flavor. Dandelion, lamb's quarters, sorrel, field cress, purslane, corn salad and poke shoots are some of the wild greens that may help fill in your menus before your own garden greens are ready to use. Then you can add spinach, turnip greens, beet greens, chard, mustard, kale, collards and others to the bill-of-fare.

You can cook any greens alone, or blend two or three kinds together. For example, try a pungent-flavored kind like turnip greens or dandelion with a milder greens like beet or spinach. Experiment a little and get blends the family likes. You cook any wild greens just as you do other greens. Wash them

thoroughly, and then pan them with a little savory fat in a covered skillet, or cook in a small amount of water for 5 or 10 minutes, until they are wilted and tender. Don't boil greens a long time or stir them much, or you'll lose most of the vitamins. Don't sieve them while they're hot. And serve the liquid that cooks out along with the vegetable--maybe using a piece of toast or bread under the greens to soak up the "pot liquor". Or save it to put in soup.

And now we come to a question about eggs. Springtime, of course, is the time to serve lots of eggs, as main dishes and desserts, when eggs are plentiful. This writer has a "why" question -- she's one of those who wants to know the reasons why certain foods behave in certain ways when you cook them. "Why do eggs thicken a custard or omelet?" she asks. And the home economists explain it this way:

Both the whites and the yolks of eggs contain a large amount of protein which thickens when heated. If the eggs are mixed with water or milk in the proper proportions, the eggs are able to thicken the liquid. The more eggs, the thicker or firmer the product.

Of course you know that flour and cornstarch also can thicken liquids. If you use flour or cornstarch along with eggs to thicken a custard, first cook the starch and liquid together to remove the raw starchy taste. Add the eggs near the end of the cooking time to avoid overcooking them. When the recipe calls for acid, as in lemon pie or cooked salad dressing, you add the acid after cooking or the acid will thin the mixture.

And with that hint we must stop for today.

