

IRISH MOSS

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Chinese gastronomes are famous for their strange dishes, prominent among which are ancient eggs and birds'-nest soup.

The secret of the palatability of the venerable eggs seems to be that they are pickled in a lime solution which preserves them almost indefinitely. They are sliced and served cold as in a salad.

The birds'-nest soup is made of material similar to the so-called Irish moss which is popular for puddings and desserts in the New England states, particularly Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The use of this small seaweed for food is not confined, however, to the United States. Its gelatinous properties and serviceability for the preparation of desserts have long been known in Europe and Great Britain, where the plant grows in abundance in many places off the coast, especially that of southern and western Ireland. A similar seaweed obtained from the Red Sea and Indian Ocean is used in Persia.

USED IN COIFFURES, HATS, BEVERAGES

Prior to 1835 the small quantity of this seaweed imported from Europe was sold in this country at \$1 to \$2 per pound. When it was found to be abundant also on this side of the Atlantic the price soon fell, and by 1880 it had been reduced to about 3 cents a pound. Besides serving as food, this marine plant has a variety of other uses, such as in making bandoline for stiffening milady's coiffure, for clarifying alcoholic beverages, and as sizing in the manufacture of calico and hats.

Irish moss, or carrageen, is one of the red algae, and as such is related to agar, or agar-agar, which yields a similar vegetable "gelatine." Its native habitat is the sea and it grows at low-water mark as well as at greater depths, but flourishes best on rocks constantly washed by strong waves. The harvest season extends from May to September. The plant is obtained in two ways—by hand-picking at low tides, and by means of long-handled rakes used from boats. Men go out in sailboats or dories at half tide, and return at half flood to scrape the "moss" off the rocks.

EXTENDED CURING PROCESS

For curing, fair weather with abundant sunshine is necessary. On being brought ashore the clumps of much branched moss-like algae are red and are spread out on the high beach to be bleached by repeated wetting and drying in the sun. The material is then placed in hogsheads, in which it is re-saturated with salt water by rolling the barrels in the marshes, after which the material is again spread out and further bleached. This alternate treatment is repeated four or five times until the product is yellowish-white. The final drying is done

in barns where the mass is finally picked over and packed in 100-pound barrels.

The Chinese birds'-nest soup is the product of a small, red seaweed which abounds along the coast of China and some islands of the Indian Archipelago, and forms, with its entangled small organisms, the principal source of food of a species of swallow. The bird feeds upon the seaweed and macerates the material in its crop. The partly digested algal substance is regurgitated and drawn out in gelatinous fiber which the birds attach with their bills. The silky adhesive matter lends itself to

the construction of beautiful white nests, about the size of goose-eggs, as thin as a silver spoon. When dry they are brittle and weigh about half an ounce. The gathering of them for food is often hazardous work. Before being used they are carefully cleaned. After they have been freed of foreign matter they are stewed with pigeons' eggs, spices and other ingredients. The cooked article suggests chicken broth.

Specimens of both the Irish moss, and the type of weed which forms the basis of birds'-nest soup, are on exhibition in the Hall of Plant Life (Hall 29).

HARWA, FIRST MUMMY TO FLY, GOES TO FAIR IN NEW YORK

When Harwa, a 2,800-year-old Egyptian, once the agricultural overseer for a temple of the god Amon, was placed aboard a United Airlines' plane for New York on April 12, he was well on his way toward establishing a list of "firsts" for the country's museum populace. It is believed he is the first mummy to travel on a plane, and he is the first adult-size person to be publicly fluoroscoped.

Harwa, a mummy from Field Museum's

Egyptian collection, was the guest of Lowell Thomas and a personal representative of the Egyptian Consul-General at a luncheon of the Advertising Club in New York on April 13. Following that, he was taken to one of the New York World's Fair buildings where he is to be displayed in the General Electric X-Ray Corporation's exhibit. There, when a visitor to the booth pushes a button, an x-ray machine will create a full-length image of Harwa's skeleton on a fluoroscopic screen.



Illustration by courtesy of General Electric X-Ray Corporation

Mummy from Field Museum Boards Plane for New York Fair

Harwa, 2,800-year-old Egyptian, is shown leaving Chicago to appear in fluoroscopic exhibit of General Electric X-Ray Corporation. At left is Mr. A. J. Kizaur, General Electric engineer who designed the exhibit. At right is Mr. Richard A. Martin, Curator of Near Eastern Archaeology at Field Museum, who served as historical advisor.



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