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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, August 20, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Please don't blame me if I start the day on a melancholy note. I can't help it if the most urgent letter in the week's mailbag asks a mournful question. A listener writes me that her beautiful currant jelly "weeps." No sooner does she serve it at a meal than its red tears begin to flow and it starts melting away. She says she even sees some of these jelly tears oozing out around the paraffin covers of the glasses in the pantry. She wants to know what to do about this weeping. And then she wants to know how to prevent it in the apple and grape jelly she plans to make in the fall.

Well, let me say a word of cheer first thing. You never need to worry much about weeping in apple and grape jelly. The less acid fruits don't make jelly that has this sad habit. But the high-acid fruits, like currants and especially cranberries seem to be the doleful ones. The more acid the fruit, the more likely its jelly is to shed tears when cut and exposed to the air. I'm no chemist, so I can't explain this so-called "weeping" scientifically. But I can suggest one practical point to prevent loss of jelly. Put up currant or cranberry jelly in small glasses -- just enough for one meal. Leave about half an inch at the top of the jar for the paraffin. And then be sure no drops or splashes of jelly are on the inside edge of the rim. The glass must be clean and dry for a good seal. Then, when you pour the melted paraffin over the top, rotate the glass in your hand so the paraffin will run up to the rim all the way around to protect the jelly from the air.

If you find jelly oozing out from under the paraffin, wipe it off with a clean cloth wrung out of hot water and pour on more hot paraffin to seal the opening.

There. So much for jelly. Now to answer the lady who wants to know what fruits make good pickles and how to do it. Fruit pickles happen to be the easiest kind of pickles to make. You just cook the fruit in a sirup that is sweet, sour and spicy all at once. The firmer fruits are used the most for pickles -- cherries, peaches, crabapples and pears are the favorites. To make the pickling sirup, you cook vinegar, water, sugar and a little bag of mixed spices for about five minutes. Then you drop in the fruit and cook it until tender. Remove the kettle from the fire and let the fruit stand in the sirup overnight. That helps to make the fruit plump. Now drain off the sirup. Take out the bag of spices. Put the fruit in hot sterilized jars. Heat the sirup to boiling once more. Then fill the jars with this boiling sirup and seal them. It's an overnight job, but an easy one, you see.

By the way, when you're pickling, the spice problem is important. The first element in the problem is whether to use whole or powdered spices. I vote for whole spices and I'll tell you why. Spice left standing with the pickles in the jar tends to darken and discolor them. That happens when you use powdered spice. But if you use whole spice, tied up in a bag, you can remove it before putting the pickles in jars. By the way, a mixture of whole spices gives a pleasant blend of flavor.

Then, in pickling, you have a sugar question, too. Shall you use brown or granulated sugar? That all depends on the kind of pickles you like best. Brown sugar will give them a stronger flavor and darker color. Some people compromise and use granulated sugar with a little brown mixed in to give a richer taste.

Now to change the subject from food to flowers. Show me the woman with soul so dead that she doesn't like a jar of gay garden blooms to cheer her house in summer. Almost everybody -- man, woman or child -- feels cheered at the sight of bright flowers. So I've collected some information to help you keep your flowers fresh indoors.

Probably you've discovered for yourself that some flowers keep well, and others last such a short time indoors that they're hardly worth picking. Well, in general, the sturdy blooms with a good capacity for absorbing water are the best keepers. Certain stems will close quickly after cutting and thus prevent the flower from getting a drink. Others have cells that naturally stay open longer. But all cut flowers, sooner or later, lose their power of drinking by the growth of bacteria on the stem. When decay sets in under water, the flowers fade. So in general if you want a bouquet to last, you'll choose flowers that naturally keep well and then you'll care for them so the stem can keep on drinking.

The naturally long-lived flowers -- those that will live about one week or more in water are: aster, calendula, campanula, carnation, chrysanthemum, gladiolus, lily, zinnia, orchid, rose, and verbenia.

The short-lived common flowers -- those that live about three days or less after cutting, are: cosmos, hollyhock, poppy and salpiglossis.

Some flowers need to have their drinking water changed very often or they become unpleasant to have in the house. The flowers that rapidly foul water are: aster, calendula, chrysanthemum, forget-me-not, hollyhock, zinnia, and dahlia. Removing all leaves on the stems under water helps keep water fresh.

Generally, any flowers keep fresh longer if, before arranging them, you clip the stems under water and let them stand several hours in deep water -- up to their necks, so to speak. And let them take this deep bath in a cool place. Certain flowers benefit particularly by floating in water before coming out on parade. Among these are the forget-me-not, the heliotrope, the pansy, and the poppy.

Every kind of flower profits by a daily change of water and a daily clip of the end of the stem. During the day be sure your jar of flowers isn't in a draft or near very hot air. If possible let the flowers revive every night in a cool place. A few varieties need special treatment all their own. The chrysanthemum lasts longer if you mash its stem. The poppy picks up after a float on lukewarm water. Hollyhocks and dahlias need a change of water night and morning. As for roses, when they begin to fade, you can often revive them by dipping the stems in boiling water and then putting them back in cold fresh water. The boiling water breaks the seal that has begun to form, and allows them to drink again.