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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, May 17, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture. Publications offered: "Poison Ivy and Sumac and Their Eradication", Farmers' Bulletin 1166; "Growing Annual Flowering Plants", Farmers' Bulletin 1171; "Herbaceous Perennials", Farmers' Bulletin 1381.

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More and more questions on the program today.

First, a poison-ivy question. Writes a listener: "How can I get rid of a great thriving poison-ivy vine that is spreading all along my back fence?"

Answer: Poison ivy is a difficult plant to kill because it is so dangerous to handle and grows up from creeping underground stems which spread in all directions a few inches below the soil. New shoots keep coming up from these underground runners.

Fortunately, cheap oil--old crankcase oil will do the job if you use it properly. You will want to thin crankcase oil with kerosene to make it spray easily and then spray it on the leaves. You can buy small inexpensive air-pressure sprayers very reasonably. Spraying saves you from getting too near the ivy plant. Be careful not to use oil where it is likely to come in contact with the bark of valuable trees -- or for that matter, with valuable plants or a lawn.

Other methods of killing poison ivy are described in a Department-of-Agriculture bulletin. I am sending this listener a copy and anyone else is welcome to one as long as the free supply lasts. The name of the bulletin is: "Poison Ivy and Sumac and Their Eradication." The number is 1166. And you get your copy by writing to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., It tells how to know both poison ivy and poison sumac; how the poisons from these plants act; how to prevent poisoning; what to do if you get it; and finally, how to kill the plants. Once more, the number of the bulletin is 1166.

By the way, several listeners have asked about the difference between poison ivy and so-called poison oak. They are simply different forms of the same plant. In the eastern and central parts of this country, poison ivy is a vine, a trailing shrub or a bush with a leaflet divided into 3 pointed leaflets. From New Jersey, Delaware and Virginia southward and southwestward, the oak-leaf poison ivy occurs. This is a form of the plant that does not climb and has leaflets that look like certain eastern oaks. Then in the western part of the country, especially on the Pacific Coast, they have a plant known as poison oak--a bush about 4 to 8 feet high that has leaflets resembling certain western oaks. But whatever form the plant takes, the poison has the same effect.

So much for poison ivy. Now here's a letter from a listener who complains that she hears a great deal about growing vegetables in the home garden but not enough about flowers. Well, far be it from your Aunt Sammy to show any partiality. I'll stop right here and send this listener two favorite Department of Agriculture bulletins on flowers. One is No. 1171 called "Growing Annual Flowering Plants." The other is No. 1381 called "Herbaceous Perennials." I don't know whether this listener favors annuals or perennials but here's information about both kinds of flowers. She can "take her pick," so to speak.

Of course, any listener is also welcome to these flower bulletins. They will give information of interest even to the lady whose garden is just a window box or a little pot of earth. Write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., for Farmers' Bulletin No. 1171 on annuals and Farmers' Bulletin No. 1381 on perennials.

Your county agent or State college also probably has flower garden information to send you that will answer the problems of your own locality.

That takes care of the flower questions. Now to answer a question about weeds. "Please tell me," writes a listener -- "Please tell me if it's true that weeds spread plant diseases."

It certainly is true -- or, as the plant scientists explain it, weeds harbor plant diseases--keep the diseases in circulation by suffering from them themselves.

Of course, everybody knows that it is wise to keep weeds out of fields and gardens as much as possible. But most people think weeds are harmful only because they choke out other plants. However, another serious charge against weeds is that they harbor various plant ills that are contagious, so to speak. One weed may be host to one kind of disease and another weed may be host to another. For example, wild mustard, which may come onto the farm with cereal seed, is a dangerous weed to have about, especially if you are growing cabbage, cauliflower and related vegetables. Wild mustard is susceptible to the 3 most important diseases of cabbage -- black rot, black leg and club root. So wild mustard helps keep these serious and damaging disease alive. And most important are the mosaic disease, especially in sections where cucumbers are grown for pickles. The wild hosts of the mosaic disease are pokeweed, physalis or ground cheery, and milkweed.

Last question: Another gardener writes that she has heard somewhere about preventing diseases in vegetable plants by treating the seeds before planting them. She asks: "Is it possible to sterilize seeds before planting them and if so, how?"

Answer: It is not only possible but a very helpful practice with certain seeds. You can control damping-off of beets, eggplant, lettuce, peppers, salisfy, spinach and tomatoes by treating the seeds. Use 1 level teaspoon of red copper oxide for each pound of vegetable seed. Put the red dust and the seed in a tight container and shake thoroughly before planting. Then, to control scab and angular-leaf spot of cucumbers, squash, melons and pumpkins, you can dissolve a 7 and one half grain tablet of corrosive sublimate in a pint of water and soak the seed for 5 minutes. Then plant immediately. By the way, corrosive sublimate is extremely poisonous. If you use it to sterilize seed, use it with the greatest care.

