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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, August 22, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Cocktails from Love Apples." Information approved by the Bureau of Plant Industry and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Whenever you feel discouraged about success in this world, just think of the tomato and cheer up. For the tomato is a vegetable that rose to fame and fortune in spite of starting out with a bad reputation -- in fact, the worst possible reputation.

Imagine how horrified our great-grandmothers would have been if they could have looked ahead to this year 1934 and could have seen a city in Texas celebrating a tomato festival where one of the prettiest girls in the state was crowned Queen of Tomatoes before thousands of good citizens who raised or canned or at least ate tomatoes as a common article of diet. This recent celebration was supposed to commemorate the centenary of the tomato as a food, though, of course, no one knows just when people became brave enough to eat one. We do know that before 1800 Americans considered tomatoes pure poison. At that time they were called "love apples," a name that came from the French who were a little bolder and apparently more romantic, because they occasionally indulged in a tomato as a love potion. But in this country only people supposed to be witches would even taste a tomato.

Well, Thomas Jefferson was ahead of his time in more ways than one. He grew tomato plants on his Virginia farm and actually dared use the fruit in sauces and soup. But a woman born in Trenton, New Jersey, as late as 1833 reported that when she was a child and tasted a tomato -- grown for decorative purposes only -- her parents rushed her to a doctor, expecting her to die every minute. Yet less than a hundred years later, canneries in this country were turning out between 15 and 20 million cases of canned tomato products, and thrifty housewives put up countless millions of tomatoes at home. Also we ate a vast number of fresh tomatoes. In 1931 tomato canning was a thirty-three million dollar industry. You may be interested to know that the three states that can the most tomatoes commercially are Maryland, Indiana and California.

But the canned tomato product that has the most amazing record is tomato juice, which we often drink just plain as an appetizer or season and spice and serve in chilled cocktails. Fancy how our great-grandparents would have felt if they had known that their descendants would some day be feeding love-apple juice to babies and invalids and drinking love-apple cocktails to start their meals! The rise in tomato juice sales has been the most spectacular of any food product during the depression. Before 1928, tomato juice was canned in very small amounts. Yet last year, only five years later, tomato juice was in demand in every restaurant in the country. It has passed the fad stage and become a national drink. Government standards of quality apply to tomato juice as to other canned goods.

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Now if you have any surplus tomatoes in your garden this summer, by all means put them up while they're finest in color and flavor, ripe and bright colored, but not too ripe. Tomatoes are the very easiest vegetable to can and they're some of our most valuable foods because they're rich in that elusive vitamin C, so necessary for health and so hard to get on a low-cost winter diet. Also, tomatoes provide a refreshing flavor that peeps up winter meals. Because tomatoes are acid, you can^{can} them safely in an open kettle. You don't have to use a pressure cooker as you do for other vegetables. And because they are acid, the heating doesn't destroy their vitamin C.

But here's a point that the experts in canning at the Bureau of Home Economics emphasize. They say never to try to can any tomato that shows even slight signs of decay or mold. One soft spot affects the flavor of the whole tomato, just as a decayed spot in an orange spoils the whole orange. Worse than that, one tomato that is "off flavor" can spoil the taste of the whole batch that you are canning.

For the sake of color and flavor, save your perfect tomatoes for canning or for making plain canned juice. The tomatoes that are not quite perfect but still very good, those that need to have a green unripe spot or some other small blemish removed, you can use for catsup or chili sauce or soup. But be sure to cut out any unripe spot for this may give a bitter taste. And be sure never to use any tomato that shows signs of spoilage.

The experts say that when you are working with tomatoes, you'll have better results if you handle them in small lots and work fast. Don't try to make more than one or two gallons of juice, say, at a time. If the juice has to stand, it loses flavor and vitamin value.

Now here are directions for putting up tomato juice at home. First, of course, use well-ripened, perfectly sound tomatoes. Cut them in small pieces and let them simmer just enough to make them soft. When they're soft, press them hot through a sieve -- a sieve fine enough to take out seeds and skins and still let the pulp through. Measure the juice and for each quart add half to one teaspoon of salt. Leave out the salt, if the juice is for a baby or for an invalid on a salt-free diet.

You can use either glass jars or tin for your canned tomato juice. Glass jars make the job simple and easy, for you don't have to process them after sealing. When the tomato juice is ready to can, heat it quickly, just to boiling. Don't let it cook for an instant longer than you can help. This saves much of the fresh flavor and color. Now, pour the hot juice into the hot sterilized jars, filling them right up to the top, and seal them at once. That's all there is to canning the juice in glass. Simply set the jars aside to cool out of drafts. And then store them in a dark cool place to preserve the color and flavor.

Canning juice in tin is a little different from canning in glass. When you are using tin cans, you heat the tomato juice just to the simmering point. Turn off the heat before the juice comes to a boil. Then pour the hot juice into the tin cans until they are full. Seal them and immediately process them for five minutes in a boiling water bath, counting time when the water actually boils, not before. After processing, cool the tin cans of tomato juice at once in running water.

