homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, September 9, 1943.

QUESTION BOX:
Sulfur apples for drying?
Burn unseasoned wood?

ANSWERS FROM:
Scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

Our first letter today brings up a question of widespread interest at this time of year.... sulfuring apples when you dry them. The home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have answered this question. And we'll have time for at least one more question about making a fire with unseasoned wood.

Here's the letter about drying apples:

"I would like to try drying some apples this fall. I've been told that you have to sulfur apples when you dry them, and I'm wondering if the sulfuring is harmful in any way. How do you do it?"

The home economists of the Department of Agriculture consider sulfuring a desirable treatment for apples and many fruits. It isn't harmful, because the sulfur cooks off when you cook the fruit. Sulfuring helps to hold the color and prevents darkening. It preserves the natural color and flavor.... prevents souring....protects certain vitamins during drying....and keeps insects away while the fruit is drying.

However, it isn't absolutely necessary to sulfur apples that you dry. You can steam them, or hold them a short time in salt water, or treat them in a bisulfite solution to keep their color. But sulfuring does a more lasting job than any of these treatments.

Dry only sound apples of the late varieties... apples that would be good to eat either uncooked or cooked. They should be fully ripe, but firm. Wash, pare, and core them, and cut out any blemishes. Cut into quarter inch slices or

rings, or into eighths.

The next step is sulfuring. It's best to do this out of doors. Spread the slices not more than 1 inch deep on wooden, glass or slat bottom trays. You can't use metal trays because the sulfur fumes corrode metal. Use a tight packing box or a wooden frame covered with roofing paper or wallboard to cover the trays of apples and hold in the sulfur fumes. This frame or box has to be high enough to cover all the trays, and wide enough to leave about a foot of extra room for the sulfur pan. At the bottom of the sulfur box you leave a little space for air to enter, so the sulfur will burn properly.

Stack your trays one above the other, supported on blocks of wood so that the lowest tray is 6 to 8 inches from the ground. Measure out 1 level teaspoonful of sulfur for each pound of apples you are drying. Don't use too much sulfur. Wrap this sulfur in a small piece of paper, and place it in a shallow clean pan beside the tray. Light the paper and cover the trays and pan with the sulfuring box.

If you cut the apples in slices or eighths, sulfur them for 20 to 30 minutes. If you cut them in thicker pieces sulfur them longer.... 45 to 60 minutes. Then put them in the drier at 150 degrees. Keep this temperature throughout the drying. You need a thermometer to check the temperature accurately and do a good job of drying.

If it isn't convenient to sulfur your apples before you dry them, steam them 5 to 7 minutes, or put them in salt water containing 1 teaspoon of salt to each quart of water.

Take the apples out of the drier when they are tough and leathery. If you are not quite sure they are dry enough to keep well, leave them in a little longer, but lower the temperature. If you find any slices that seem a little moist, return them to the drier. One or two moist pieces may start mold in your package.

Now you're ready to put the dried apples in moisture-proof containers and store them in a cool, dry, dark place. Look at them once in a while to see if they are staying dry. If you find any sign of moisture, reheat them to 150 degrees for 15 minutes, and seal them up again. A good way to store dried foods of any kind is to put them in small airtight bags and then put the bags in a lard can or stone crock and seal.

Drying apples is only one of many farm homemaking problems. Here's another --a "burning" question, you might say. A woman writes: "We have recently moved to an old family farm, and find no wood laid in for the winter. We have plenty of wood on the place for the fire-place and kitchen range, but we shall have to cut it as we go along. I understand that hardwoods have to be seasoned 3 to 6 months. What woods could we use now, without waiting for them to season?"

The Forest Service says quite a few woods burn fairly well without much seasoning, and if you have any of them on your property, you can use them for fuel any time. Then to hasten the seasoning of some of the other woods, leave the branches on the trees for a while after felling. In 2 or 3 weeks considerable moisture will be drawn out through the leaves and then you can have the trees cut up and stacked and they will season in a shorter time.

A good many of the pines and evergreens, you can use without seasoning. While they make a quick hot fire, they don't burn as long as the hardwoods like birch, oak, and maple. But they'll carry you along until some of the others are seasoned enough to use. And, of course, if there are any sound dead trees on the place, you can cut them up and use them for fuel right away, too.

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