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Investigate Home Canning Methods

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Canning survey reveals need for more information and equipment, says Frances Kerekes

MORE canning information and better canning equipment will be needed for the coming gardening season, according to the results of a garden and canning survey made by the Iowa State College Agricultural Extension Service and the State Nutrition Council.

Interviewing approximately one family in every thousand throughout the state, Dr. P. Mabel Nelson, chairman of the nutritional council, and Mrs. Ruth Seaton Hicks, extension nutrition specialist, were able to make a reliable estimate of the total number of gardens, the amount of food preserved, the nature and extent of spoilage and canning equipment needed.

Judging by the 692 families who were interviewed, approximately 88 percent of the families in Iowa grew gardens last summer. In 1944, the number of gardens is expected to increase by 2 percent, although the space utilized for them will not increase.

Nearly 95 percent of the families interviewed had canned foods during 1943, which means that between 143,000,000 and 160,000,000 quarts of fruits and vegetables were canned in Iowa.

This is exclusive of the food preserved in other ways. These methods accounted for 2,500,000 quarts of frozen food, 5,900,000 bushels of stored food, 500,000 pounds of dried food, 1,000,000 gallons of brined food and 20,000,000 containers of jelly, jams, relishes and pickles.

But there is also a serious and discouraging side to the picture. Almost 40 percent of the canners surveyed had spoilage trouble, some in only one or two jars, but others in as many as 100. Although this is only 1.45 percent of the total, it amounts to 2,000,000 quarts of spoiled food. This would have supplied 16,000 Iowans with 125 quarts per person, the amount recommended in the 1943 canning budget.

Corn led in spoilage, which is not unusual, since it is difficult to can under home conditions. Surprisingly, however, tomatoes and fruits, considered to be among the safest products which can be canned at home, ranked second and third on the list.

One-third of the women questioned concerning causes of spoilage attributed it to defective lids, while one-fourth had no idea what had happened. Common reasons given were that the food had stood too long before it was canned, was of poor quality, poor technique was used, lids or rubber rings were old or new rings were of poor quality.

Believing that the term "sterilization" meant scalding, many of the women had failed to boil their jars and lids for the requisite 15 to 20 minutes. A lack of understanding of bacteria and their relation to food spoilage was shown by those who blamed the reduced amount of sugar for spoilage of fruit. The home canner was also inclined to accept a neighbor's or relative's advice on how to process foods, instead of obtaining the authentic information which was available.

Especially heartening was the spirit of many who were interviewed. In one city, 3 of the 15 families contacted were war workers. One of them, a young couple, had canned 350 quarts, all at night. In another family, the mother had sacrificed her vacation to can 300 quarts.

An invalid in a wheel chair had canned 250 quarts of food and stored several bushels of potatoes, in addition to caring for a family of five.