Shoulder Arms Against Telltale Tarnish

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AS SHE brings out her best silver platter to bedeck the Thanksgiving table, the homemaker frowns again at the dull tarnish which has collected. Isn’t there some way science can assist the polish jar in keeping metal tableware well-groomed?

To answer this question completely, at least a year of concentrated research would be required. It is true, however, that proper care and a knowledge of the effects of certain foods and conditions will help the homemaker in maintaining spic and span dishes.

Pewterware, an American favorite since Colonial days, is fashionable again in new designs and modern stocks of tableware. However, considerable care is required to keep pewter in good condition for it tarnishes readily and needs frequent polishing. Easily scratched, it may be ruined by injudicious cleaning. A daily dusting and frequent bath in warm, soapy water are much more satisfactory and will keep it in fine condition.

Pewter is a soft metal and, like fur, should be rubbed the right way, which is round and round—never up and down. Pewter also is subject to dents and breakage and cannot withstand a high degree of heat. Therefore, care should be taken in serving very hot dishes or foods which hold the heat for long periods of time on pewterware.

Silver, a precious metal used as tableware for historic centuries, is not affected by moisture, dryness, alkalies or vegetable acids. Sulphur is destructive to silver; hence, woolens, flannels or any cloth that has been bleached, presumably by sulphur, has no place around silver either for wrapping or cleaning.

Because of its appearance and the fact that it is an excellent conductor of heat, a copper teakettle is one of the choicest of kitchen utensils. Copper remains bright in dry air and pure water; when exposed to damp air, however, it turns a reddish-brown due to the formation of oxide, and on long exposure a green substance, verdigris, is formed.

To remove this greenish deposit from copper, use a weak ammonia solution. Half a lemon dipped in salt or even a lemon from which juice has been extracted will also clean copper.

If food is cooked in a tarnished copper saucepan, the organic acids will react with the oxide forming soluble salts which are poisonous. It is, therefore, not only desirable for appearances’ sake but also essential to the safety of the family’s health that copper dishes used for cooking and serving be highly polished, a process in which our grandmothers took great pride; their granddaughters finding such care often too laborious have left the copper kettles of the eighteenth century for the antique dealers.

Chromium, a hard steel-grey metal, is never used in its pure form. However, it is one of the most valuable of plating metals because of its hardness, resistance to high temperature, imperviousness to most acids and salt spray. It can be plated on iron, steel, copper and brass, and the resulting product is the hardest substance known, other than the diamond, and it appears attractive in modern serving dishes.

Stainless steel, valued as a material for knife blades, which is resistant to acids found in foods is produced by alloying steel with 15 percent chromium. Chromium plated appliances, because of their resistance, require no special care.

Nickel, inconspicuous metal, makes a good coating for other metals because of its resistance to rusting. Alone, it is a hard, white metal with a slight yellow tint. It takes a high polish, resists many chemicals and doesn’t readily tarnish; however, on the whole it is not as desirable as chromium plating.

Nickel may be cleaned with hot soap suds and wiped dry. Never use an abrasive for it will scratch, nor do not allow salt solutions to stand on nickel. When stained, polish with a commercial nickel paste which is allowed to dry before rubbing.

Enamelware should be treated as glassware, since it is a metal base fused with layers of glass. The better grades of enamelware have more layers than the cheaper ones. There is little action between the glass and compounds in foods. Care must be taken lest the glass surface break off or chip, although it is probably more unpleasant than dangerous to find a chip of enamel in food.