

AGRICULTURE

Tear Gas Fumigates Strawberry Patch

► **TEAR GAS** is now being used to kill a soil disease in strawberry patches. California growers have turned this World War I and police weapon into a peacetime soil fumigant.

California soils have been plagued with a widespread infestation, verticillium wilt, which required the growers to move to new land every three or four years.

Chloropicrin, the World War I tear gas, has long been recognized as an effective fumigant against the major bacteria and viruses attacking strawberries and other crops. However, use was limited because of its possible effects on humans.

Now the gas is applied to the plants beneath a very thin polyethylene sheeting. A machine injects the chemicals as it spreads a synthetic cocoon over the crop. As a result, growers are now getting longer use of productive soils.

• Science News Letter, 87:159 March 6, 1965

Nature Note

Starlings

► **SOME OF THE NOISIEST** squabbings, fussings and squawkings going on these late winter days come from the aggressive, sharp-tongued starlings.

These glossy black nuisances with iridescent feathers have taken over the suburbs and city areas throughout much of the United States.

With a Latin name *Sturnus vulgaris*, they have the vulgar and obnoxious habit of driving off attractive native birds such as flickers and bluebirds, ganging up on them, and sometimes killing them to take over their nesting spots and territories. The Latin word, *vulgaris*, incidentally, actually means common.

Possibly the most numerous bird now in North America, the common starling came originally from western Europe in the late 19th century. Since then, it has thrived only too well in America, gradually invading the eastern states and then spreading out in all directions as far as the Pacific.

Starlings are more or less migratory during the spring and autumn. Vast hordes of them spend the winter in the northern cities where they accumulate in noisy jittery gangs on public buildings, downtown trees or other city perching areas.

They have become such a nuisance that many devices have been tried to shoo them away—loud noises, dangling mirrors, recordings of a starling's distress cry. During the President's inauguration, a sticky substance was applied to their favorite perches which penetrated their feet in an uncomfortable and yet harmless manner.

Starlings are one of 5,099 species of the Passeriformes, the largest and perhaps most highly advanced or evolved of the 27 bird orders. These Passerines, or perching birds, include members such as flycatchers, larks, wrens, thrushes, warblers and sparrows.

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