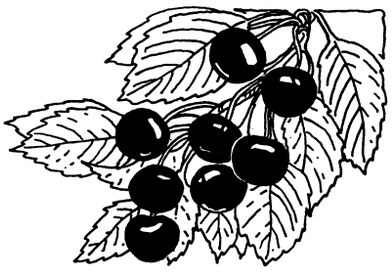
AGRICULTURE

NATURE RAMBLINGS

by Frank Thone



Oils From Kernels

➤ REMEMBER how you saved prune pits during the first World War? If you were in the Army, you had to, Buddy; the corporal at the end of the mess table saw to that!

It looks now as if fruit pits and stones are going to be put to use again, though in a different way and for another purpose. What they wanted, back in 1917-18, was the shells, for gas mask charcoal. They have plenty of that now.

What's wanted in this new World War are the kernels within the pits, for the oil they contain. Such special oils as sweet almond oil, formerly imported, are on the list of war shortages now, and the oils from apricot, peach and cherry kernels resemble this rather closely. Prune-kernel oil would do nicely, too, but not many prunes are pitted at the processing plants.

It is not likely that housekeepers, restaurant owners and mess officers will be asked to save fruit pits this time. It is easier and far less expensive to go to the concentrated, quantity sources, the canneries and fruit-drying plants, where fruit pits have long been a useless waste, fit only for burning under the boilers. In normal times, the expense of cracking the pits and extracting and refining the oils has been too great, but with the price of oils much higher it seems worth while to install the necessary machinery.

Another source of vegetable oil that is recommended for industrial attention is the avocado. This fatty fruit has been steadily gaining in favor during recent decades, but as yet there is no really good, paying outlet for the disposal of culls and damaged fruits. Avocado oil is very much like olive oil in quality and flavor. Incidentally, despite the large quantities of olives raised in the West, domestic olive oil has never supplied more than 5% of the American market.

So-called rice bran oil has also received comparatively little attention. If ways can be found to prevent it from turning rancid, it has possibilities, Department of Agriculture chemists say, as a substitute for the now scarce vitamin-rich sardine oil in animal feeds.

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What then must we do? Why not do what the human race always has done—use the abilities we have—use common sense, judgment and experience. We often underrate the importance of intuition.

In almost every scientific problem which I have succeeded in solving, even those that have involved days or months of work, the final solution has come to my mind in a fraction of a second by a process which is not consciously one of reasoning. Such intuitive ideas are often wrong. The good must be weeded out from the bad—sometimes by reasoning. The power of the human mind is far more remarkable than one ordinarily thinks. We can often size up a situation, or judge the character of a man by the expression of his face or by his acts in a way that would be quite impossible to describe in words.

People differ greatly in their ability to reach correct conclusions by such methods. Our superstitions and the present popularity of astrology prove how often our minds make blunders. Since we have to live with our minds, however, we should train them, develop them, censor them—but let us not restrict them by trying to regulate our lives solely by science or by reason.

Our morality is a kind of summation of the wisdom and experience of our race. It comes to us largely through tradition or religion. Some people justify evil things on the basis of morality—but by and large a recognition of right and wrong, even if these concepts are sometimes fuzzy, has proved to be of incalculable value to mankind. The philosophical, metaphysical or even scientific analysis of the principles of ethics has not proved particularly fruitful. A sense of morality and decency, although not scientific, may be a major factor in winning the war.

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