MEDICINE

Lack of Use and Vitamins Cause Temporary Blindness

➤ LACK OF use and lack of vitamins are probably the cause of the blindness reported in the Nazi soldier rescued after six years entombment in an underground supply depot.

Eye specialists see the same kind of blindness in patients who have to wear a patch over an eye for a very long time.

The Nazi soldier should recover his eyesight in a week or 10 days, though he may have to wear a bandage over his eyes for much of that time. His eyes, after the long time in the darkness, are probably very sensitive to light. This would make it hard for him to open them enough to tell whether or not he can see. The bandage will be necessary while his eyes are getting over their light sensitivity.

Temporary blindness of much this sort was seen in prisoners of war immediately after release from Japanese prison camps. The trouble in these men was caused by poor diet, rather than by lack of light and use of their eyes. Even though the supply depot had enough food to keep the Nazi soldier alive for the reported six years, he must have lacked fresh food to supply vitamins A and B.

His nerves for seeing probably were not damaged and this will allow him to regain his eyesight.

The permanent blindness suffered by fish which live in caves did not come on in six years but evolved slowly.

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INVENTION

Remove Poultry Feathers By Cold Water on Skin

➤ SCALDING OF poultry as an aid to removing the feathers is not required in a method for which Seth S. Barker, Ottumwa, Iowa, was awarded patent 2,557,335. It utilizes a device by which the feathers are stood upright, exposing the skin. Then cold tap water is applied direct to the fowl.

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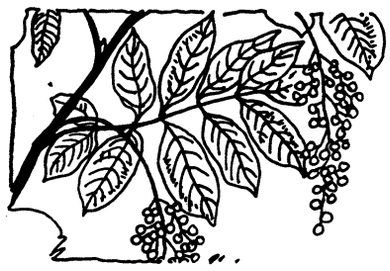
BOTANY

NATURE RAMBLINGS



Poison Sumac

➤ MOST PEOPLE, when they hear for the first time that poison ivy is really a sumac, are inclined to be a little incredulous. The plant does not really look much like a sumac. But it takes no argument in the case of poison sumac. This venomous shrub of the bogs is hard to distinguish, at first glance, from its harmless cousin of the uplands.

It is very easy to get poisoned with poison ivy; that happens on Sunday school picnics and the mildest of country walks, for poison ivy is everywhere. Poison sumac is reserved for slightly hardier souls, who go in for hiking or nature-study activities that may require wet feet, because poison sumac is a creature of the bog-edges, and does not grow in upland woods at all.

This is perhaps fortunate, for though fewer persons are susceptible to it, the luckless ones it does affect get a much worse "dose," usually, than poison ivy is able to inflict.

Poison sumac is easy enough to identify, although it looks much like ordinary sumac, except that its bark is a pallid gray.

The chief stigmata by which the poisonous sumac may be separated are the fruits. Last year's fruit-clusters persist on both kinds, as a rule, so that they may be looked for at any season. Poison sumac fruits are lax clusters of pallid white berries, hanging down. Common sumac fruits are tiny dark-brown or sooty things that look a good deal like coarse coffee grounds, and their dense clusters stand stiffly erect.

Furthermore, the two plants grow in totally different kinds of terrain. Poison sumac is a shrub of lowlands, preferring the soggy soil of acid-water bogs. Common sumac is a plant of the well-drained upland soils.

A third sumac, the harmless staghorn sumac, grows in wet places, but it can be told from the poisonous species by the sooty fuzz on its upper branches, and by its fruits, which are like those of the common sumac.

Science News Letter, June 30, 1951

ENGINEERING

Good Roads for Defense

➤ THE IMPORTANCE of good roads from a military standpoint was stressed at the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping meeting in Washington by Col. John G. Ladd, commanding officer of the Army Map Service. Roads are equally important to the progress, general welfare, and the defense of our country, he said.

Many of the important events in our military history have centered around roads, and battles have been won or lost, depending upon the existence or lack of them, he added. An intimate knowledge of terrain is a strong asset in any military operation. This was proved during the Revolutionary War where the ragged troops of George Washington, due to their knowledge of the countryside, successfully defended our country against vastly superior British forces.

Behind the selection of sites for the construction of highways is the need for good maps, including those showing topographical features. Most of our vital defense plants are situated near and dependent upon the principal routes of communication, he stated.

The responsibility of defending these plants and maintaining these routes is becoming increasingly larger due to the fact that the plants are decentralized. They are producing separate parts of the finished product at scattered points and bringing them together for final assembly. If one of these plants were bombed by hostile aircraft, only a part of a decentralized plant would be destroyed. Our defense industry activities depend upon our highway system for access to sources of supply and distribution of finished products.

Since maps give a complete and accurate terrain picture, they are invaluable to our military commands in determining what points would be vulnerable to enemy attack. With the knowledge of topography gained through the use of maps, defense plans could more readily be made for the deployment and movement of troops, positioning of artillery, maintenance of supply lines, and the selection of strategic points at which to stockpile materials and equipment that would be immediately available for the reconstruction of any of the vulnerable points affected.

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