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Mother Spoiled It All.

While I was still in school, I attended an evening party at the home of one of my girl friends, writes a correspondent of the Chicago Journal. When it was time to go, there were two fellows who wanted to take me home. I was very much flattered and accepted them both. One of the boys appealed to me strongly and I imagined myself deeply in love with him. But, as it was getting late, and my folks were worrying about me, my mother set out to meet me. When she saw me with a fellow on each arm, she was scandalized and started to scold, while the boys, very much frightened, ran away.

Hint Was Taken.

"We had a number of guests to dinner one evening," writes Mrs. W. G. "and in serving the chicken my husband overlooked our little daughter Elsie. She sat there with a disappointed look on her face for a while, then a thought struck her. She crumpled a piece of bread on her empty plate and holding it up she beckoned to the dish of chicken saying coaxingly, 'Here chick, chick chick! Here chick! Here chick!' There was a roar of laughter and Elsie was quickly served."—Boston Transcript.

The Candid Hostess.

"To make yourself at home, ladies," said the fluttering bride when a group of friends called to congratulate her on her marriage. "I'm at home now and I want you all to be."—American Legion Weekly.

Not Unusual.

"The doctor said I must put down everything on the chart." "Well?" "The patient tried twice to kiss me. Must I put that down?" "I think not," said the kindly head nurse.

Use Soap.

If the belt on your sewing machine loosens, rub it with plain yellow soap and it will help until you can have it fixed.

Life As I See It.

All the trouble I ever got into I prepared for myself.—Exchange.

Removing Ink Stains

Pyrophosphate of soda is recommended for the removal of ink stains. This salt does not injure vegetable fiber and yields colorless compounds with the ferric oxide of the ink. It is best to first apply tallow to the ink spot, then wash in a solution of pyrophosphate until both tallow and ink have disappeared. Another formula is to use a mixture of four parts of tartar and two parts of powdered alum. This is not injurious to cloth. Other stains also may be removed with it.

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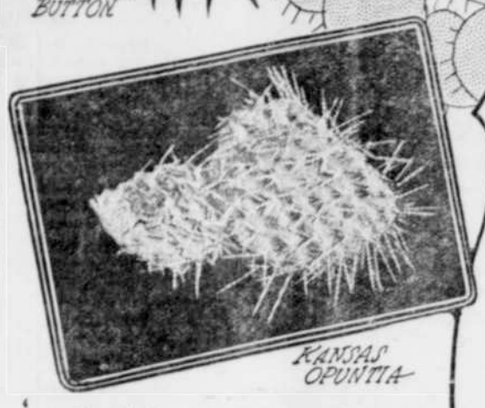
CACTI and THEIR USES

MEXICAN ECHINOCACTUS



KANSAS OPUNTIA

AMERICAN DESERT CACTI

Photographs by courtesy of U.S. Natl. Museum

HELIOCEREUS MALLISONI

CACTI are as much a part of the desert as the sand and the blinding glare and the lack of water. The desert without the cactus would be like "Hamlet" with Hamlet left out. There are something like five million square miles of desert scattered about the globe and it takes about a thousand species of cacti to go round.

But the traveler does not have to visit all the deserts of earth to find variety of species. Down on the border line between the United States and Mexico there are famous cactus areas, where this curious and interesting plant may be found in bewildering variety. At one end of the scale the desert wayfarer sees the giant saguaros, 50, 60 feet high, fluted, columnal forms with branching limbs and curving lines. Close to the other end is the dreaded choyas—little round patches of glistening, frosty white. And under every bunch are the discarded joints, like little frosty pine cones covered with spines. Old desert travelers claim that the choya is alive and leaps at man and horse. Certain it is that it seems impossible to avoid the steel-like thorns that pierce leather and flesh. Apparently they are poison thorns, for the pain is like no other and almost unendurable; they sting and burn and at the same time seem to freeze—and they stick like a barbed fishhook.

On the other hand, there is the bisigni cactus—which has saved uncounted lives of those who know. Its barrel-shaped mass contains a fluid resembling water; and it is cool. Then, again, there is the cactus that furnishes "peyote"—a stimulant of which the Indians are so fond that congress has thought of passing legislation to control its use. Again, there are cacti that furnish delicious fruits. Some of the cacti are good eating. Some are used for the manufacture of a variety of articles ranging from toothpicks to chairs. One kind of cactus has been used for ages as a hair brush.

In short, the cactus is almost as useful to the American of the Southwest and to the Mexican as the buffalo used to be to the plains Indian. It is no wonder that the cactus is seen on the flag of Mexico and many of the old-time coins and that it is the state flower of more than one of the American states of the Southwest.

Manifold as are the present uses of the cactus, there is every indication that its usefulness will be extended by the evolution and development of special varieties. For example, there is probably a future for the spineless cactus as a food for cattle. Any forage that can be grown on the desert without irrigation and has a food value something like half that of alfalfa is bound to have a future. The world is presumably to hear further from Luther Burbank's experiments. Dr. P. L. Sherman, experimenting with spineless varieties, found that they were rich in sugar and were fitted for the manufacture of cheap candy. It is also easy to imagine conditions a few years hence under which it will be worth while to develop the fruits of the cactus family.

So, all in all, the cactus family is one of the most interesting in the world, to say nothing of its value, both actual and potential. Dr. William A. Murrill of the New York Botanical garden has written for the Scientific American Magazine a most interesting article outlining the many uses of cacti. The article is illustrated from photographs by courtesy of the United States National museum. Says Doctor Murrill:

It is estimated that there are three billion acres of desert land in the world; and, if these unattractive and unproductive wastes are ever to "blossom like the rose," it will be the cacti or plants similarly adapted to desert conditions that will furnish the flowers. Desert plants were like other plants once, but the vital necessity for preserving moisture gradually wrought a wonderful change in their appearance and structure. Few of the cacti now have any conspicuous leaves, their place being taken by flattened joints, or pads, which are modified portions of the stem; and even the sap has become mucilaginous or milky, preventing the loss of water to the hot, dry air by which these plants are continually surrounded. Spines of various shapes and sizes serve to protect them against grazing animals that are often killed when driven by hunger and thirst to devour these plants in spite of their spines. The few forms of spineless cacti that occur in the wild state always frequent rocky ledges and other situations that are inaccessible to most animals, if not to all.

The number of species of cacti recognized is large, amounting to about one thousand, and half of these are found in Mexico. They vary from tiny plants no bigger than one's finger to trees 60 feet in height, presenting all manner of queer and interesting shapes and furnishing the botanist with no end of knotty problems. Extensive collections of living plants may be seen under glass at the New York Botanical garden, the Department of Agriculture in Washington, and the Missouri Botanical garden in St. Louis; while others in the open are to be found at Riverside, California; Tucson, Arizona; Mesilla Park, New Mexico; Laredo, Texas; Miami, Florida, and elsewhere.

Cactus plants are certainly not ornamental in the ordinary sense, but beauty is relative. A forest of giant cactus trees stretching mile after mile in the desert with nothing to rival them may be decidedly attractive. In Mexico the cactus ornaments the national banner and is stamped on many of the older coins, while in Arizona and New Mexico it has been selected as the state flower.

The cactus family is noted for the magnificence of its flowers, which are usually large, often fragrant, wide-spreading or tubular, diurnal or nocturnal, evanescent or persistent, and vary in color from white, yellow, or orange to rose-colored, deep-red, or purple. The calyx and corolla are not distinct, but the numerous stamens in the center are often differently colored and lend an added charm to the flower. The fruit is often brilliantly colored, highly ornamental as well as useful, and lasts for a long time.

The cactus plant has indirectly added much to the attractiveness of certain manufactured garments by supporting the cochineal insect, from which the famous cochineal dye is made. This insect occurs on a species of Opuntia, the cochineal fig, and its near relatives, along with other mites and scale-insects, but it is so minute and difficult to distinguish with the unaided eye that it was long thought to be the seed or bloom of the plant itself. Leeuwenhoeck, in 1703, discovered that it was the female of an insect (Coccus cacti), which never moved from a certain spot on the cactus, the male being the active member of the family, but colorless and therefore useless. These insects are harvested three times during the dry season, being swept from the cacti into wide-mouthed bags with stiff brushes and killed in boiling water or hot ovens, after which they are dried in the sun and put up in small packages for the market. In this thoroughly dried condition 70,000 insects are required to make a pound.

The ornamental value of cacti, although important, is not uppermost in the mind of the average inhabitant of arid regions. The trunks furnish him material for houses, corrals, firewood, etc., and, when planted close together, they form hedges that are lasting and impervious. It is here behind a shield of thorns that the little cactus wren finds a refuge from hawks where she can build her nest and rear her young in safety.

The cactus trunk is composed of a wood axis, or skeleton, surrounded by pulp. From this skeleton table legs, chairs, napkin rings, canes, veneering, etc., are made. The spines also are useful, serving as needles, toothpicks and pins for mending leather or cloth. Some are curved and supply ready-made fish-hooks, while the straight ones are bound to slivers of bone to form very efficient barbs. One species of cactus bears fruits that resemble great chestnut burs, and these have been used by the Indians for ages as hair brushes.

The pulpy parts of the stems and fruits are highly valuable as food both for man and beast. The young pads, or joints, may be cut into strips and cooked like string beans, or boiled as greens or stewed like okra, or fried like eggplant, or pickled, or made into sweetmeats like citron. "Tuna cheese" is made from the fruits of certain cacti, while the juice of red fruits is often used in coloring ices, jellies and candies, and even in water-color painting.

The traveler who "knows how" need never lack for water where there are cacti. He may cut off the top of a barrel-cactus, pound up the pulp and squeeze the water from it into his drinking cup. He will find it slightly salty and bitter, but clear and rather palatable. Or he may support a cactus trunk on stones, build a fire under each end, and make a hole in the middle, from which the water will gradually trickle.

The Indian traveler also uses the milky juice of Mamillaria for healing cracks in his feet or for internal complaints when on long journeys. One of the most curious and interesting of the cacti is the "mescal button," or "peyote," which is a strong stimulant and allays all hunger and thirst and fatigue for the time being. The Tarahumare Indians and Huicholes of Mexico make a cult of the "peyote," going on long pilgrimages in search of it and employing it both medicinally and religiously as a cure for all bodily ills and a powerful aid to abstinence.

In certain parts of Mexico, Sicily and elsewhere, the natives live almost entirely on fresh cactus fruits when they are in season. They grow them in gardens and orchards and often gather them at dawn when they are coolest, although their temperature is always below that of the surrounding air. They are also used in salads, preserves, pickled with lemons, dried, fermented as a beverage, made into a syrup called "tuna honey," a thin paste called "melocha," or a thick paste similar to guava jelly. Even the seeds are sometimes dried and saved to use when the fruits are gone.

The Barbados gooseberry, used for tarts and sauces in the West Indies, is apple-shaped and decorated with small leaves or bracts. The plant, Pereskia aculeata, is a straggling shrub with slender branches, recurved prickles, glossy-green leaves, and clusters of pale-yellow flowers.

The prickly pears, or tunas, are abundant and much used. They are pear-shaped or globular, weighing from an ounce to a pound; red, yellow, or purple in color; and usually sweet, though sometimes acid in flavor. The skin contains clusters of tiny spicules, or glochidia, which are very irritating if taken into the mouth, so that care is required in peeling them. They are sometimes called Indian figs or Barbary figs because of the numerous small seeds which they contain. Several species of Opuntia are cultivated for their fruits as well as for their edible joints. The flowers are large, usually yellow or orange, rarely rose or red.

Delicious fruits are those of Cereus pitahaya and its relatives. This species grows to the height of 60 feet and its trunk reaches two and a half feet in diameter. The fruit is gathered at dawn with long reed sticks armed with several prongs.

The fruits of Cereus giganteus, a handsome cactus of the Southwest, are also much esteemed either in the fresh state or preserved. They are egg-shaped, two or three inches long, green on the outside and crimson within. The strawberry pear, obtained from Cereus triangularis, is pear-shaped, bright-red, with slightly acid pulp, making it desirable in the fresh condition or as an ingredient of the "pepper pot" of the West Indies. Excellent fruits are also produced by Lemaireocereus thurberi and certain other large tree-cacti, and these "pitahayas" do not have the annoying prickles found in the fruits of Opuntia.

"Garambullas" are the small currantlike fruits of Myrtillocactus. They are eaten fresh or dried like raisins. The melon cacti produce a number of small edible fruits resembling tiny scarlet radishes or red peppers. The Mexican strawberry, found on a species of hedgehog cactus, is salmon-colored, two inches in length, and very sweet in flavor. It gets its name from its numerous minute seeds. Tetezo figs, so important to the natives of southern Puebla, are the fruits of a species of Pachycereus.

Although many of the wild cacti furnish valuable food for man and beast, it must be admitted that there is room for improvement both in the quantity and the quality of this food. I have visited Mr. Burbank's experimental grounds in California and fully realize the difficulty of his task in dealing with the cacti and the importance of his results. His problem was to take a vagrant, forbidding plant, and divest it of its thorns and prickles, breed out its indigestible woody skeleton and improve the size and flavor of its fruits.

The fruits of the Burbank creations are over three inches long, usually yellow or red in color, and have flavors all their own, resembling those of peaches, melons, pineapples, etc.

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"I? Certainly not! What do you think the servants are for?"—Boston Transcript.

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Decided.

"Jones and I have made a bet and you are to settle it. I say that—"

"What are the terms of the wager?"

"Oh, the loser is to buy a good dinner for the three of us. I claim that—"

"Nemmine that. I never knew Jones to pay a bet. You lose."—Judge.

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