

Creative Living

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weeder's guide

Earl Aronson

Measuring for melon sweetness

SOMEDAY, a purse-size sweetness meter you carry to the market may help you pick a ripe melon or other fruit or vegetable.

Noting that melons which look and smell ripe at the supermarket often have been picked too soon to be sweet, U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers have developed a device that uses light rays to measure just how sweet honeydews, watermelons and cantaloupes are.

The gadget, which is currently the size of a breadbox, monitors melon sweetness by measuring the amount of near-infrared light the fruit absorbs. The more light absorbed, the sweeter the fruit. Unripe melons with only 6 percent sugar can sweeten to the ideal 11 percent in just a few days on the vine.

The Agricultural Research Service says that the meter not only helps farmers pinpoint when a melon is ripe for picking, it should also make it easier for wholesalers and retailers to identify vine-ripened fruits.

The meter also works for onions and papayas; peaches and nectarines will be tested next.

SUNFLOWER SEEDS: On a pound-for-pound, dry weight basis, sunflower seeds have twice as much iron as raisins, as much calcium as whole milk, and all the protein of beef but with no cholesterol, according to the ARS.

Researchers suggest three tasty new ways to eat them: sour cream-and-onion flavored, honey-roasted, and roasted and salted in a blend with raisins. These treats are part of a sampler of three North Dakota crops packaged to celebrate the state's centennial.

The National Sunflower Association and Sigeo Sun Products, of Wahpeton, N.D., packaged the sampler with seven different sunflower, soybean and wheat snacks.

Detecting Muddy Apples: An apple that looks crisp might prove to be mushy when you bite into it. So, fruit experts have developed a technique called spectrophotometry, which detects invisible bruises on apples.

The method, say ARS researchers, breaks down a light beam into its individual colors, or wave lengths. In tests by ARS and Cornell University, apples were bruised and a beam of light directed to different parts of the fruit. Damaged areas reflected less light, while undamaged areas reflected more light, characteristic of a healthy apple.

Packing houses would use this technique along with equipment they now use for color sorting.

NEW VIBURNUM: ARS has developed a new dwarf viburnum, named Eskimo, expected to be available to home gardeners next year. Reportedly, it blooms profusely and is resistant to bacterial leaf spot. The new variety, developed at the ARS National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., grows slowly under partial to full sunlight in heavy loam soil with an adequate moisture supply. It has glossy, dark, semi-evergreen foliage and is termed ideal for landscaping, hedging or mass planting. After three to four years, it produces snowball-like flowers in early May.

LISTENING TO INSECTS: A high-tech microphone in an acoustic system can tell grain operators when insects are most active among stored grain. The microphone can detect feeding sounds — amplified up to 75,000 times of the lesser grain borers, rice weevil and Angoumois grain moth, ARS reports.

This information can cut costs to farmers and grain operators by telling them — with no need for grain samples — when insecticidal fumigants should be used to do the most good.

NEW, RICH CARROT: Beta III, a carrot reportedly three times richer in beta carotene than other carrots — and with good flavor and growth habit has been developed by ARS scientists at Madison, Wis. ARS says it provides hope for improved nutrition, healthier eyes and disease-resistance worldwide.

Earl Aronson is the Associated Press garden writer.

Warhol Collection at 2 area galleries

Two area art galleries have been designated local distributors of the official Nouvelles Images and Andy Warhol Collection of posters and cards, published by Nouvelles Images of New York.

The complete collection will be available at Grafkian Art Gallery, 218 Merrill, Birmingham and Nelson's Custom Framing, 16376 Middlebelt Road, Livonia.

The collection, the largest ever introduced to the U.S. market, is the first collection authorized by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. It includes many of Warhol's most famous paintings, such as the series of Marilyn Monroe, Campbell's Soup, and self-portraits.

Upbringing has effect on neatness factor

Q: Your last column stated there is no genetic difference between the organizational abilities of men and women. How about cultural upbringing? Does it have an effect?

A: Yes, there are definitely environmental and cultural differences. Whether or not a person is naturally adept at neatness and order, the beliefs impressed upon people during their formative years do affect life-long habits.

A few years ago a set of two tests was distributed in several European countries. One was a questionnaire, the other a test designed to reveal innate ability. Observing the neatness of the countryside in the various cultures might convince you that the people who live there are genetically different. The questionnaires seemed to confirm these differences, but some of the innate ability tests seemed contradictory.

The researchers went back and interviewed a number of respondents in each country. Explanations revealed that questionnaire answers were often motivated by cultural bias, rather than personal feelings. For instance, on one question, "I have trouble keeping my personal papers up-to-date," some respondents admitted that their answers were guided by reluctance to admit to socially unacceptable behavior. In short, the innate abilities seemed equal in all the countries, but the cultural standards caused differences.

I have just returned from a trip to Germany, where neatness and order permeates every aspect of life, and



organizing

Dorothy Lehmkuhl

was reminded of my own German cultural upbringing here in the United States. While not perfectionists, both my parents were very neat. My dad, especially, used to be mortified if he was caught with any kind of mess. Any accumulations or unused equipment had to be carefully hidden from view; to be messy was simply beneath their dignity. (In retrospect I marvel at how calm they remained while guiding the four of us children through our teenage years.)

As I have said before (and to quote whoever said it first): It takes pressure to produce. There are few people who truly cannot be well organized if they try hard enough or if the need is great enough. It may be much more difficult for those who are not innately neat, however, and actually produce stress which would not develop in a naturally organized person.

You can still enroll in the new "Organizing Your Business Life" seminar series taught by Dorothy Lehmkuhl beginning this Thursday evening, Oct. 5, at Troy Adult Education (678-7592). Her daytime "Organizing for Success" series begins Tuesday at the Birmingham Community House (644-8832) and Wednesday at Schoolcraft College (462-4448).

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