

Home/Garden

Surplus corn may offer la

By EARL ARONSON
The Associated Press

Communities all across the country are concerned because space for landfills, their dumping grounds for rubbish, is running out, with non-degradable plastics causing much of the problem.

But some relief may be on hand, with the help of starch obtained from the nation's surplus corn.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is conducting experiments with corn to make a plastic mulch that degrades when no longer needed.

"We are working on new formulas for mulches, used for crops and gardens, that will biodegrade when we want them to — say, in three or four

months," Department of Agriculture chemist Felix H. Otey said recently.

He added that as new technical advances are made in incorporating starch into films, these starch-plastic blends could "replace conventional plastic mulches made from petroleum-derived chemicals."

Otey and associates at the department's Research Center in Peoria, Ill., are formulating mulches that protect tomatoes and other high-value crops from weeds and drought, extend the farm-garden growing season by warming the soil earlier in spring, and help farmers produce earlier crops that command a good price.

About 285 million pounds of petroleum plastic film are produced each

year for agricultural use, half of it for mulching. The figure could reach 423 million pounds by 1990, Otey said, adding that his studies were "encouraging" and could lead to less expensive mulches.

Tests indicate that starch-plastic mulches could be timed to break down naturally after the crop is harvested, Otey said, saving the expense of having to remove, burn or bury them, and preventing damage to the environment.

"We are studying formulations that would make it easier to know when starch-plastic blends will be degraded by micro-organisms such as molds in the soil," Otey added. "We also hope to stop the new film from becoming brittle as it ages and

from being

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Ginger, garlic: Comforting herbs

The season of sniffles and coughs is upon us. When we're feeling afflicted and melancholy, it's tempting to look in the drugstore for some magic panacea that will relieve our winter miseries, but a better solution might be to spend a little extra time at the produce counter of the supermarket.

Gail Ulrieh of the Blazing Star Herbal School knows the powerful virtues of these common and aromatic herbs — ginger and garlic. She had several suggestions for ways they could be used as cold remedies.

Like the ancient Romans who considered ginger an important culinary herb, we tend to think of ginger as something that goes into cake and cookies, but Hippocrates used ginger medicinally and the Chinese drink ginger tea to cure dyspepsia and revive the appetite. The creeping rhizomes of this plant are thought to resemble the convoluted of the human digestive tract, so, according to the Doctrine of Signatures, it is useful in curing digestive maladies.

It is also beneficial when you have a cold. "Ginger is very warming," Gail says. "It increases circulation and breaks up cold congestion. It's easy to make an infusion or tea. Grate one ounce of the fresh ginger root into a 1 pint canning jar and fill with boiling water. Ginger is very

Pat Leuchtman



Between The Rows

volatile so you only need to let it steep for 20 or 30 minutes. Strain out the ginger and either heat up the tea to drink or pour the whole pint into a hot bath and enjoy a good aromatic soak.

Garlic is also known for its medicinal powers. It's antiseptic and has been known to lower high blood pressure. Gail says it's an excellent cold cure and passed on this recipe that she got from a Japanese woman. Peel all the cloves in one garlic bulb and put them into a spaghetti pot of boiling water. Simmer for 20 or 30 minutes and strain out the garlic. Pour all the garlic infusion into a hot bath and enjoy relief from your symptoms.

Garlic oil can help soothe earache pain. To make this oil, take a small jar and nearly fill it with chopped fresh garlic. Leave just a little room, then completely fill the jar with pure olive oil. Let the garlic steep for at least six weeks before using. When anyone in the family has an earache,

put in a couple of drops of the antiseptic garlic oil and a bit of cotton for relief.

A variation on this remedy is to make a garlic and mullein flower oil, filling a jar with equal amounts of chopped fresh garlic and mullein flowers, filling with olive oil and letting it steep for six weeks before using for earache. Gail also gave me a general recipe for a soothing cough syrup using horhound, mullein, wild cherry bark, comfrey, licorice, star anise or coltsfoot.

"If you haven't been growing and preserving all these plants all summer, you can usually buy the dried herbs in bulk at a health food store. When making an infusion you should use one ounce of herb leaves to one quart of boiling water and steep it for four hours. An infusion of roots would require one ounce of grated root steeped in one pint of boiling water for eight hours. You can easily multiply these amounts if you wish."

Make your root and leaf infusions separately, then combine and simmer till the liquid is reduced by half. This double strength solution is now a decoction. For every cup of decoction add three teaspoons of honey and 1 teaspoon of brandy which will act as a preservative. You can store this cough syrup in the refrigerator and it will last all winter. Adults can take one tablespoon every four hours and children can take one quarter to one teaspoonful depending on their age and size.

Gail was enthusiastic about echinacea which has gotten a lot of publicity lately for its power to strengthen the immune system. The root of *Echinacea purpurea*, the coneflower many people grow in their gardens, must be used fresh, but the root of *E. angustifolia* can be used fresh or dried.

"To make an extract, you chop the root into a jar and then fill with 100 proof vodka and let it steep for six weeks. At the end of that time, strain out the root and store the extract. I take five drops a day for ten days in a row every month during the winter. If I should get a cold, I raise the dosage to 10 to 30 drops and take it three times a day. I take the dose in a glass of water, tea or juice. It's good in cider."

Even when I'm not battling cold symptoms, I like to take a comforting herbal bath, adding an infusion of rosemary leaves or lavender flowers. It's a sweet way to prepare for a winter night.



Recorder/Christopher W. Wingham

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