

Ice cream makers have improved quality

It's come a long way. Ice cream, that is.

Used to be you had a choice of vanilla, chocolate or strawberry...butterscotch if you were lucky. Today, you could spend the better part of a lifetime trying to choose from heavenly hash, pina colada, strawberry cheesecake or bubblegum delight.

The variety of ice cream flavors available today is testimony to the advances in ice cream production over the past few decades, says Doug Goff, a University of Guelph food scientist specializing in ice cream.

Changes in the way ice cream is processed have not only improved the product's quality, but have opened the way for manufacturers to dream up a few hundred variations on the ice cream theme.

Along with changes in the way ice cream is manufactured have come changes in the way it's distributed, says Goff. Ice cream used to go straight to the corner store from a local manufacturer, then quickly home to the icebox. Today, it goes

from factories to delivery trucks to grocery store loading docks to display cases to your shopping cart to your car and then, finally, to your freezer. Along the way, there are many opportunities for the ice cream to partially melt and refreeze, causing unpalatable ice crystals to form.

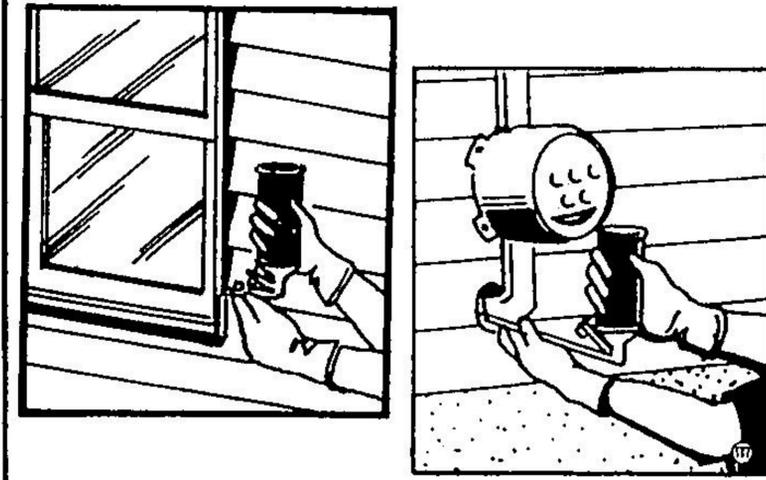
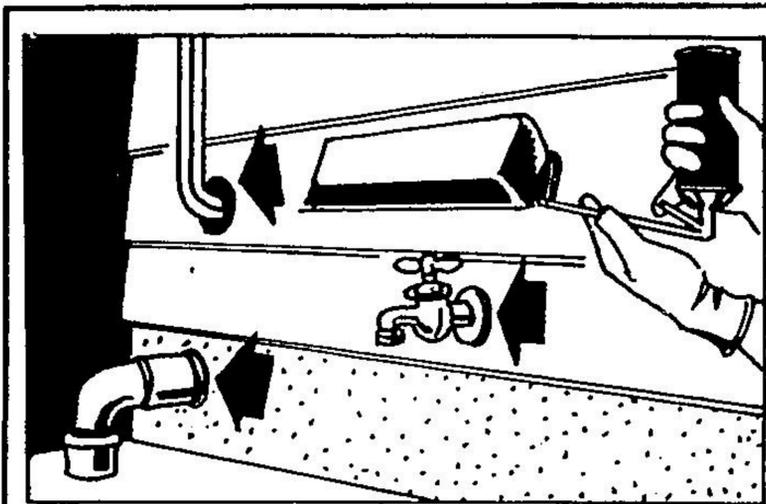
To inhibit crystals, manufacturers add stabilizers to their products. Gelatin used to be the stabilizer of choice, but now producers use polysaccharides originating from plant gums and seaweed. You'll see them listed on the label under such names as locust bean gum, guar gum and carrageenan.

The other odd-sounding names on the label are emulsifiers, which give ice cream its smooth consistency. Originally, egg yolk was used, but manufacturers today use mono- and diglycerides or Polysorbate 80, which are fats and carbohydrates.

To consumers, the additives listed on the label may seem overwhelming, but they actually make up less than one half of one per cent of the weight of the ice cream, says Goff. The rest is cream, milk, condensed milk, sugar and corn syrup. And all additives have been thoroughly tested for safety, he says.

So next time you're hanging around an ice cream counter, you needn't spend your time worrying whether the treat is safe to eat. Concentrate instead on the all-crucial decision of what flavor to try. And whether that'll be one scoop or two. And whether to have it in a cone or a cup. And whether...

Can someone get us some chairs? This is going to take awhile.



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Biologists fight pollen spread

Pollen grains in the air may give some people runny noses, but pollen from genetically undesirable trees gives the Ontario forestry industry a headache...worth millions of dollars a year.

University of Guelph researchers are trying to find ways to ease that headache by stopping the haphazard spread of pollen from "bad" trees to "good" ones.

Environmental biologists Peter Keenan and Franco DiGiovanni are working with the Ontario Tree Improvement Council and the Ministry of Natural Resources to study the movement of pollen in jack pine seed orchards in Northern Ontario.

To ensure that only the best trees are used to replant an area after cutting, foresters collect seeds from "plus trees", those that are growing straight, tall and quickly in the wild. These seeds are planted in seed orchards - clearings in the northern forests - or are grown into seedlings in greenhouses before being replanted in the orchards. There, they are pampered until they, too, begin to produce seeds.

These seeds are harvested and grown into seedlings for replanting operations. It's hoped they will have the same desirable traits as their grandparents.

"The problem is that the genetically superior trees in the orchards are surrounded by a forest containing genetically inferior trees," says DiGiovanni. Trees aren't fussy, so they don't care whether pollen comes from commercially desirable or short and twisted stock.

"From 30 to 90 per cent of the seeds are set from pollen contaminating the orchards, but no one has come up with an effective way of excluding it."

Before they can find ways to exclude contamination, the researchers must determine just how much is occurring. Last spring, they set pollen traps - blocks of wood with sticky slides on four sides - in a jack pine seed orchard north of Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

As their data accumulate in subsequent years, the researchers will modify a computer model designed by Environmental Canada to predict aircraft spraying drift



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