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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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PLANTS AS WEATHER PROPHETS

The list of plants popularly supposed to furnish indications of coming weather is a long one. In many cases their merits in this respect are entirely mythical. This statement applies to all prognostications of coming seasons drawn from phenomena of the vegetable world. There is no truth, for example, in the notion that the thickness of corn husks in the autumn shows whether the following winter will be mild or severe. On the other hand, many plants exhibit certain movements in response to variations in moisture, temperature, sunlight and possibly other atmospheric conditions, thus serving as crude meteorological instruments and giving some slight clue to weather changes a few hours in advance. Their value in this connection is on a par with that of the weather house (in which dwell Jocky and Jenny) and some of the other familiar weather toys.

Probably the most famous of plant weather prophets is the common pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*), a low-growing herb with little red or occasionally white flowers; originally European, but now widely distributed over North America. It has gained the name of the "poor man's weather glass" because of its alleged habit of closing its petals before a shower. The pimpernel is, however, often found wide open when rain is falling, while in all kinds of weather it is usually closed in the early hours of the morning and the latter part of the afternoon.

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