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December 6, 1933

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed November 29, 1933

HOARFROST CRYSTALS

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Hoarfrost is often described as frozen dew, but this description is misleading. Sometimes dewdrops form in the evening and then, as the night grows colder, they are frozen to little balls of ice, which may be regarded as one variety of hoarfrost. Most deposits of the latter, however, are not ball-shaped and are not formed from dew. The ice crystals condense directly from the invisible water vapor in the air, and they then assume a great variety of shapes.

One shape consists of little hexagonal rods. This type of hoarfrost crystal is more likely to appear when the air contains a good deal of moisture and is not very cold. In dryer and colder air the crystals often take a much more remarkable form. Under a magnifying-glass each is seen to have the shape of a hexagonal cup -- an inverted hollow pyramid -- mounted on a slender stem. These formations are sometimes described as "hopper" crystals, and they have also been compared to trumpets. In many cases two or more of the cups are grown together, forming more complex structures.

These cup-shaped crystals require calm air for their formation. Besides those found outdoors, on plants and the like, fine specimens may be seen in refrigerating establishments.

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