

Still the top household tool after almost 180 years!

Put yourself in place of the early American housewife for a moment: there you are with a house full of dirt—no broom, no vacuum cleaner, carpet sweeper or other handy helper. All you have is a bundle of twigs tied to a handle. About all you can do is push the dirt around your hearth and floors with this gadget called a “besom” (beé-some). It leaves interesting tracks in the dirt, but doesn't do much else!

But wait! (Sound of trumpets)



Here comes good old Ben Franklin to the rescue!

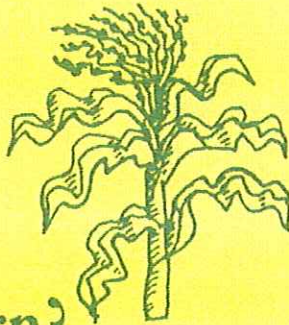
One day when he wasn't busy flying kites or saying sage sayings, he sowed the seeds for a strange plant he had brought back from Hungary on his travels. This plant was called *broomcorn*, and with it he earned the undying gratitude of millions upon millions of Americans who could burn their besoms and pick up their handy dandy, honest-to-goodness *brooms!*

Since the first broomcorn broom that Franklin introduced in 1790, there have been many other brooms and brushes made, but the king of them all is still Ben's broomcorn broom.

No one has ever figured out how to improve it, since it's one of the most efficient and economical cleaning tools we have. In the United States alone, we use over 50,000,000 broomcorn brooms a year! You can feel the reason for this continued success by running your fingers up the broom stalks. The prickly little “hairs” you feel catch and hold dirt and dust. Synthetic broom fibers don't have these built-in dust catchers, which is why they aren't as efficient in cleaning.

Today, the broom is so popular it's carried by supermarkets, discount stores, hardware and janitor supply stores. You'll even find brooms in the household goods section of many department stores. And you'll find several different kinds of brooms in their racks, including extra sturdy brooms for outdoor work and even brooms in color! It's really amazing how much we owe to the inventive genius of Ben Franklin!

Whoever heard of broomcorn?



Besides Ben Franklin, that is. It isn't exactly one of our best known agricultural crops. A claim to distinction: it's one of the few that isn't subsidized by the federal government.

The average crop is only around 20-25,000 tons, grown on about 150,000 acres largely in Oklahoma, the Panhandle section of Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. Not a huge crop, but important far beyond its size.

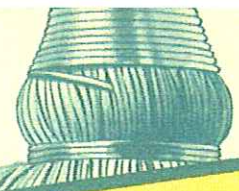
Broomcorn for brooms

Broomcorn has quite a "pedigree," probably originating in Africa where its older relative, Kafir, is believed to be native. It is a tall, cultivated plant that is derived from a variety of sorghum, which is the family name for a kind of tropical plant. Broomcorn itself is grown for the stiff-branched, elongated panicle (which is a pyramid-shaped, loosely-branched flower cluster) that is used in making brooms and brushes.

The standard varieties grow ten to fifteen feet high, and are used mainly for carpet brooms. The dwarf varieties of broomcorn reach two to six feet. These plants resemble corn, and the seed clusters of broomcorn grow at the tip of the stem, like the tassels of corn.

When the broomcorn is ready to be harvested, workers go through the fields and break over the top of the stalks by hand. Later, the seed clusters are cut or jerked from the stalks by hand. The clusters (branches) are threshed to remove the seed, and the seed is usually discarded, unless it is saved and ripened to plant for the next year's crop. For several weeks the strawlike branches are dried, and then the brush is baled in 300-400 pound bundles and shipped to broom factories.

Brooms are best...



for...

- Sweeping wood, tile, linoleum, cement and any other kind of floor
- Getting dirt out of carpets and making the nap look like new after it's been beaten down by feet and vacuum cleaners

for...

- Cleaning dust and cobwebs off walls and ceilings
- Sweeping light snow and cut grass from sidewalks and steps
- Retrieving clothes from under beds
- Shampooing rugs

for...

- Props for snowmen
- Beating rugs
- Knocking wasps' nests from under house eaves
- Gifts for kitchen or closet bridal showers
- Completing a witch's costume for Halloween
- Cleaning fireplaces

whisk brooms are great for...

- Sweeping boat and car interiors
- Brushing lint off clothes—put a little hook on your ironing board and keep one handy when ironing clothes or linens
- Cleaning work surfaces in your wood-working shop
- Cleaning inside corners of upholstered furniture or floors when trimmed into a Vshape
- Creating a "brushed" design when painting walls and ceilings
- Cleaning stair carpeting
- Removing hair and lint from small throw rugs
- Taking dry mud or snow off dogs and cats

Sweeping Statements



You should have a different broom for different jobs around the house—one for upstairs, downstairs, the basement, the kitchen and outdoors.

Don't mix them up—in fact, it's a good idea to label them with a marking pen. Good sanitary practices demand careful use of *all* of your cleaning instruments.

You can easily afford plenty of brooms because they're so inexpensive.



Take reasonable care of your broom and you'll lighten your work. A good broom is much easier to work with.

Follow these hints:



Don't store your broom standing on the sweeping end. It bends and warps the straws.



A little bit of water or dampness never hurts a broom if you shake it thoroughly and hang it up or stand it on the stick end.



Don't keep it in a place that is hot and dry. It makes the straw brittle and stiff.



When the first three inches or so are worn down, discard the broom or use it only to scrub basement floors. A worn broom takes twice the energy to do half the work.



Buy only the best quality broomcorn brooms and whisk brooms—they cost little or nothing more.



Here's a quick way to tell quality:

If the broom is a natural color, it should be a shade of clear greenish-yellow. Check

the inside of the broom to be sure the inner stalks are the same length as the outside ones. The broom handle should be smoothly finished and lacquered.

1001 uses for broomsticks

The broomstick is one of the cornerstones of modern civilization. Without it, millions of pieces of clothing in closets all over the land would rest on the floor. Thanks to broomsticks we have . . .

- Clothes poles
- Paint mixers
- Window props
- Support stakes for vines and tall plants
- Racks for hanging freshly ironed blouses and shirts—prop the broomstick between two chairs
- Portable dog tenders
- Tent stakes
- Scarecrows for the garden
- Bats for "stickball" games
- Limbo sticks
- Hiking sticks
- Flagpoles for the side of the house
- "Pokers" to get unreachable off closet shelves
- Exercise sticks
- Handy helpers to lift things from dye solutions or hot water
- Flagpoles for waving white flag of surrender
- "Discipline sticks" for children and large dogs
- Hole-diggers for planting

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