

Speeding up the American Hen

(Continued from Page 6)



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or in front of the perches. They have cut their expenses, increased their profits and seldom have to fuss with rousy hens.

The fresh-air type of house has revolutionized poultry keeping. Such houses should be at least twelve feet deep, though, with the perches at the back. The common shed-roof pattern which the average man builds in his back yard is about as good as any. Made with single boarded walls and covered with roofing paper, it ought not to cost more than a dollar for each fowl to be confined in it. The renter can buy a ready-made portable house and take it along with him when he moves. No man likes to donate a hen house to his landlord.

The farmer will pay a long price to get the best blood into his cattle, while he ignores his feathered mortgage lifters. Yet breeding is as important with poultry as with horses and cows. An Englishman has come over here with a lot of White Leghorns and has walked off with most of the honors at Storrs. He knows how to breed. He has already speeded up his hens.

No one but himself knows the Englishman's formula, but there are many Americans who would like to. On general principle, the pullets which lay first in the fall and heaviest in midwinter are the birds to use as breeders, but not that season. Right there is where many amateurs make their first great mistake. They try to pick out the pullets which have laid heaviest all winter and set their eggs. What is the result? Why, the eggs hatch poorly, while the chickens are anaemic and unprofitable. Naturally enough, too, if you stop to think about the matter. A heavy laying hen has so exhausted herself by February or March that she is quite incapable of producing strong and virile chicks. Save those pullets until the second season, pen them by themselves and allow them to take their own good time about laying. Then they will give you some chicks worth a well-bred cockerel.

JUST here come eugenics as applied to poultry. With all stock breeders great store is set by the sire, yet for years the poultry experts breeding for eggs devoted most of their attention to the female of the species. Read the reports of the Maine state station to see how badly this plan worked out. Of late the experts have revised their theories. They tell us now that as much or more depends upon the cock. To get more eggs, therefore, you use a male from a pen of extra prolific hens. He transmits the egg laying tendency to the pullets which he sires. This is the latest secret of heavy egg production, an open secret, as you see.

Yet our chanticleer has no cause to boast himself, for likewise it has been decreed that when the hatching season is over he shall be inconspicuously banished. The average farmer believes that the hens lay better when there are a few roosters to boss them around. Actually, they yield more eggs when the "hens only" sign is up. Some progressive egg farmers never have a male bird on the premises, which is an innovation, but made feasible by the new plan of selling day-old chicks. They simply place an order for as many chickens as they will need and rid themselves of all incubation troubles.

SCORES of inventors are devising new things to sell poultry keepers. The back-lotters are the best buyers, but occasionally the professionals get interested, especially in something which seems to economize labor. If a poultry keeper works all the time it is not because he is enamored of work. Now, the ordinary brooder will safely accommodate fifty chickens. A new kind will care for nearly a thousand. Practical breeders looked askance at it when it was first introduced; it promised too much. Now, however, they are beginning to use it and have time to go fishing. For my part, I was as skeptical as the others until I saw one of the brooders and heard the testimony of the horny handed old farmer who was using it. It is really a little stove so arranged that it deflects the heat to the backs of the chicks as they gather in a great circle around it, stretching themselves out luxuriously on the warm sand.

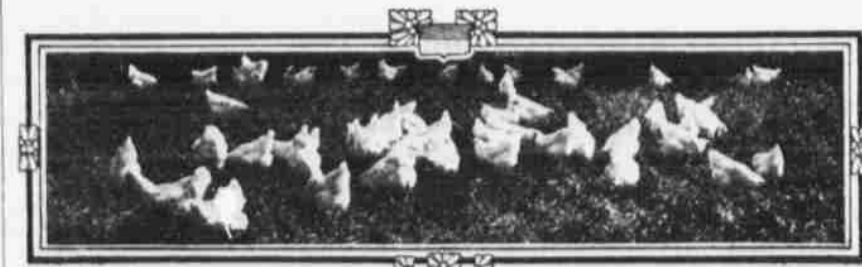
A difference of ten eggs a year from each hen in a back yard flock may mark the line between profit and loss. So may the time of year when the majority of the eggs produced by the hens are laid. In winter they will bring sixty cents a dozen; in summer as little as twenty-five cents. If the birds are confined, the summer feed bill will not be much less than that of winter, while the income will be more than halved. The aim, then, must be not only to get more eggs but to get them at a season when it is contrary to the plans of Nature for hens to lay. Fortunately, the laying tendency is flexible. Breeding and management bend Nature to man's will.

PULLETS to lay heavily in winter should begin before the snow flies. Of late there has been a lazy tendency to postpone hatching too late in the spring. March and early April is the proper hatching season. October is the month for the first eggs to appear. Pullet eggs laid in September are usually small. It is an imposition on a customer to ask the regular price for them. Some stores now display pullet eggs marked at reduced rates.

Pullets should be in winter quarters by the first of October. Moving them later will check the egg yield. When laying birds must be shifted from one house to another, it is well to make the change at night and to omit the evening meal. If an abundance of grain is given in the litter in the early morning, the hens will be too busy satisfying their hunger to observe the new surroundings.

Every effort should be made to keep the flock cheerful and contented. The psychology of poultry keeping is of more importance than is sometimes realized. Fright, harsh treatment and unpleasant quarters have disastrous effects on the egg yield. One Leghorn breeder declares that the passing of a stranger through his long laying house will cut down the number of eggs laid that day. Nobody gets into that house at the height of the laying season except the poultry keeper.

The birds must have exercise to be kept in normal condition. That means that they should be kept busy scratching in a litter of straw or leaves five or six inches deep for their grain ration. His satanic majesty finds plenty of work for idle hens to do—and it isn't laying eggs.



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