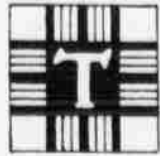


HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR HOLIDAY POULTRY

BY ANNA BIRD STEWART
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



THE TURKEY is the bird for the holiday season, as typical of it as the eagle is of the Fourth of July. In the old country the roast goose has always been the Christmas dish, for the turkey is pure American. When we sit down, therefore, to our Christ-

mas dinner we may excuse our appetites on the score of patriotism. Turkey patriotism in these days, however, is apt to be an expensive virtue. Some of us may have to "make believe" with a fat chicken. Others may wish to prove devotion to historical tradition by roasting a goose; or we may even show originality and a disregard for the convenience of the carver by selecting a duck. But the chances are that our choice for Christmas dinner will fall on turkey.

Having decided, the next thing to do is to select our bird. We are paying well for it, so we want the very best obtainable. What are the rules by which to judge? How can the young or inexperienced buyer, without relying solely upon the word of the dealer, know young and fresh poultry from the old or long killed?

There is less likelihood of cold storage turkey being sold than perhaps any other variety of poultry. The old-fashioned plan of raising turkeys under the natural conditions has been superseded by the advanced methods of modern science, worked out with the aim of insuring a more even market for the product. As a rule, turkeys are marketed practically full grown, not young like spring chickens. They are seldom kept over, nor is the market often overstocked.

If one wishes a turkey out of season, then a storage bird is better than one freshly killed. The quality of the meat of a live turkey begins to deteriorate about March, while if the frozen product has been properly fed, slaughtered, bled, packed and stored, there is no appreciable loss of tenderness or flavor within six months.

In some markets, it is possible to buy all kinds of fowl alive; this guarantees the age and freshness of the meat. But remember that after the birds have been killed, they should be hung in a cool, draughty place for from twenty-four to forty-eight hours, as the flavor improves. If used at once, the taste is unsavory and the meat is invariably tough.

People who live in small towns or who have a back yard where they can keep poultry cooped up and fed on cereal grain for a few days before killing, will be assured of delicate, tender and sweet-savored flesh. The kind of feed absolutely determines the character of the meat. The cleaner the diet, the more delicate the flavor of the meat will be.

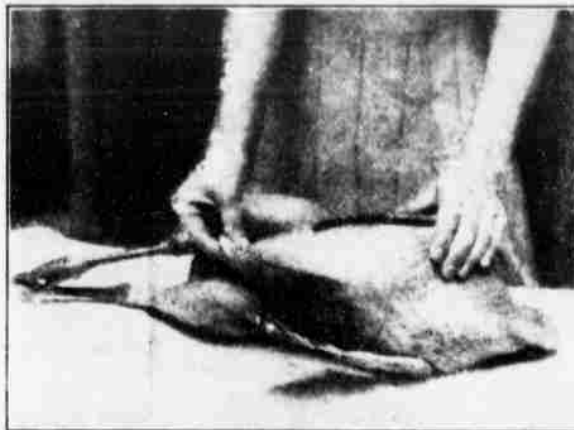
Milk-fed poultry is the most popular. This means that the fowls are given milk to drink instead of water, and are fed with a mash of corn-meal mixed with milk. The color of the corn determines the color of the skin, yellow corn meal making yellow skin and white corn making white skin. Many consider that a yellow skin denotes a richer meat.

In choosing poultry, first pull back

the eyelids and examine the pupils of the eyes. All freshly killed birds have full, bright eyes and moist, soft, limber feet. If stale, the eyes become dry and sunken, and the feet and legs stiff. When too stale for use, parts or all of the body darken, sometimes turning green. Incomplete removal of blood shows in red dots over the thighs and wings, in small veins in the wings and breast and in large veins in the neck. This blood, as well as clots formed by bruises, should be removed by soaking in cold salt water; but, if possible, buy poultry that has been properly bled at the start. It tastes better. The neck is the first place to discolor, becoming red, purple and at last green, as age progresses. A bluish or greenish look around the veins indicates decay. Bluish or shiny skin is another sign of danger. If there is any doubt about a



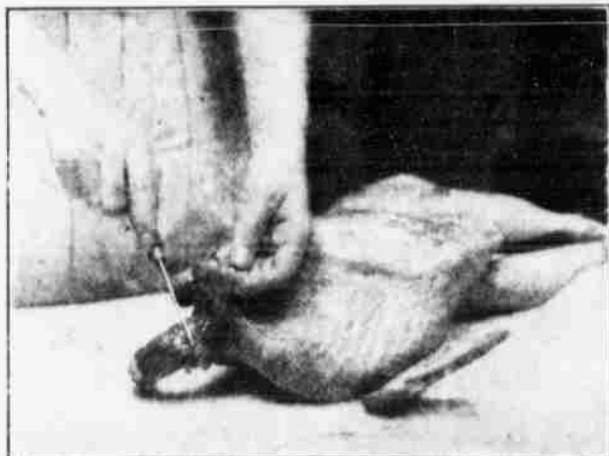
First, pull back the eyelids



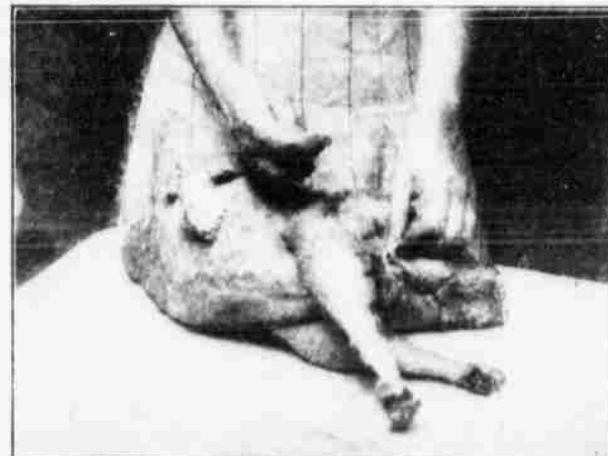
The breast bone should bend easily

fowl already bought, pour hot water on the inside, after drawing. If a disagreeable odor results, do not use the fowl under any consideration.

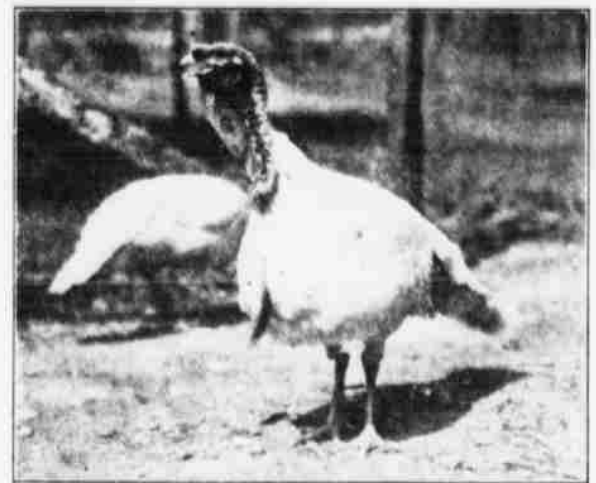
Having made sure by bright eyes, supple feet and clear skin that the bird is freshly killed, the next thing to find out is its age. A young fowl has pin feathers, and a cartilaginous end to the breast bone. The latter should bend easily from side to side, and feel like the gristle of the ear. An old fowl has long hairs and a hard breast bone. The legs of young turkeys are smooth and dark; other kinds of poultry are better with light-colored legs. Old turkeys and chickens have legs with scales that are thick and rough. The head of a pin can be pressed easily into the breast-skin of a young turkey, goose, duck, chicken or other fowl. If tender, pressure of the finger under the breast bone or wing will break the skin, and the joints will yield readily when the wing is turned back. Young



Remove the head, saving the neck for the giblet sauce



Close the opening at the rump with long stitches



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poultry in the best condition will have a thin tender skin, a fat breast and a thick body.

In general, these are the rules that fit the selection of all kinds of poultry. There are, however, certain useful suggestions applying to the choice of particular kinds of fowls.

In choosing a turkey for a small family, get a young hen if possible, for it will be plumper and generally fatter than a cock of the same age. A young gobbler is a better selection if a larger bird is desired. An old turkey is suitable only for boiling and boning. A very large turkey, even though young, is more apt to be tough than one of medium size.

Press across the breast of a turkey to see if the wish bone is pliable, and make sure of a soft gristly bone where the breast joins the stomach. Frequently, the breast bone of a turkey is out of shape, due to roasting on a narrow perch. If extremely crooked, the quantity of flesh on one side of the breast will be lessened, but there will be no injury in quality. Get a straight breast bone if possible, in order to obtain the greatest amount of white meat. The bird is old if the breast bone is hard and covered with tough-looking, thick, soft fat skin, or if the flesh is purplish where it shows on the legs and back, under the skin.

The spring chicken or broiler is distinguished from the full grown hen or fowl, as the dealers term it, just as a young turkey is judged. Young chickens have tender skin, light, fresh colored bills, smooth red combs and smooth feet. The spurs of a cockerel are soft, short and loose. When old they become firm and fixed. At the age of a year, a chicken's breast bone hardens and the bird passes out of the broiler class.

A broiler should weigh from one to one and a half pounds. A fowl or pullet for roasting should of course be larger and should have plump, fat, white flesh that will mash on the breast under the finger. A

rooster is good only for soup. Never take a coarse, long legged, thin breasted chicken because it is heavier. There will be more breast meat and less bone in the plump, full breasted, partridge shaped fowl, which will also be juicy, fine grained and of good flavor. Barred Plymouth Rocks and Brahmans make especially fine roasting chickens, and these varieties are much used for the best capons.

There is nothing better in poultry than the capon. The body is larger, fatter, and plumper than that of the common fowl. The head is small for the size of the body, the comb pale, short and withered, and the neck feathers unusually long. A thick vein on each side of the breast may usually be seen, running into a hard, fat stomach. If very young the legs will be smooth and the spurs short, thick and soft. The capon commands

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