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**The Press Poultry Department**

Conducted by H. S. Canon, Magalia, Calif.

Send questions for this department direct to Mr. Canon to insure prompt answers.

**Natural Incubation.**

Without artificial incubation the poultry industry could never have reached its present enormous proportions. The incubator and brooder have made it possible to hatch and rear chicks in numbers that would be absolutely impossible with the natural way of hatching with hens.

Yet, for the "city lot" and "back yard" poultryman as well as the farmer who only raises a few fowls, the natural method is quite satisfactory. And while setting a hen seems like a very simple operation, it is seldom done as it should be done, for like so many simple things, it seems that many people do not consider it worth studying or thinking about.

One of the commonest mistakes is giving the hen more eggs than she can cover well. I know the temptation. One more egg may mean one more chick, we argue, and we keep adding one more and one more until the hen that should not have more than thirteen has sixteen or seventeen, and the hen that could cover fifteen has eighteen or twenty. Now it would be alright if the eggs remained in the same position all during the period of incubation, but they do not. When the hen leaves the nest, the eggs naturally roll to the center, and when she returns, she works her body down so that the breast rests on the bottom of the nest and not on the eggs, and in moving the eggs around they are shifted from one position to another, so that the eggs which were in the center of the nest yesterday are on the edge today, and those which were on the edge are in the center, so that all of them take their turn, several times, partly, or entirely exposed, which, during the early part of the season, is sure to result in chilling and either killing the germ outright, or weakening it so that it cannot produce a strong, livable chick.

Do not set the hen in the same nest she has been laying in. It is probably infested with vermin which will multiply rapidly during the three weeks the hen is sitting. Take a clean box 15 to 18 inches square, and about a foot deep. Into this put about five inches of moist earth. Shape this into a well rounded nest, packing it well in the corners, and line with clean hay or straw, well broken. Put the nest in a dark place, where other hens will not bother the sitting hen by crowding into the nest with her to lay, as this usually results in one or more of the eggs being

broken and covering the rest with a coat of white and yolk which clogs the pores of the shell, shutting off the chick's supply of air. This will soon kill the chick unless the eggs are washed in tepid water and the film of dried egg entirely removed.

The object of building the nest of moist earth is to furnish moisture to the eggs. A hen knows instinctively that the eggs need moisture, and in stealing her nest away from the building, will almost invariably make it on the ground, under the protection of some overhanging bush or under a barn or other building. The moisture from the ground keeps the eggs from drying down, and keeps the lining from becoming so dry and tough that the chick cannot break through when the time comes for it to hatch.

Unless a hen is very gentle and very broody it is best to remove her from the nest where she has been laying to the nest prepared for her, at night. She will then settle down on the eggs and by morning will have become accustomed to the change in her surroundings. A supply of food and fresh water should be left where she can get it when she is ready for it. Many hens do not leave the nest the first day.


Every effort should be made to keep down the vermin while the hen is sitting. I think that I may safely say that every healthy hen has a few lice. By the end of the second week these will number quite a few, and by the end of the third week there will be many.

Dust the hen frequently with some good insect powder, and if fresh tobacco stems can be secured, break up a few occasionally and sprinkle them in the nest. A strong cigar will do as well. Lice detest the odor and fumes of tobacco and will not breed where it is. Since most varieties of lice do not breed on the fowls, but in the nest material, straw and litter on the floor, the best way to fight them is in their breeding places. The head louse, however, breeds on the fowl, and must be treated accordingly. They are the deadliest enemy the baby chick has, and a dozen or so of them will kill a chick in a few hours.

Coal oil mixed with grease will kill off the head lice, but it must not be used on the hen, for it will kill the chicks in the shell. It can only be applied to the chicks after they are hatched, using a feather and applying the grease all about the chick's head, neck, and throat. The head-lice work only in those places. Ten drops of oil to a table spoon of lard or other oil is the proper proportion. The lard will have to be melted and the oil mixed with it while hot. Apply while still warm enough to run freely.

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