

Buying Laying Birds for a Household Poultry Flock

BEFORE BUYING laying birds the household poultry keeper must consider a number of aspects, including when to buy, what class of bird to buy, and the source from which to obtain them. These points should be clearly understood if the householder is to make a success of poultry, and this article by the Animal Industry Division discusses in detail the main aspects of buying laying fowls.

THE NUMBER of birds to be kept will have been decided when the size of the laying shed was planned, and stocking the shed with more birds than it was intended to hold is most unwise. Overcrowding invariably leads to trouble with either the health of the birds or their production.

Beginning with pullets is economically sound for reasons which will be given in a future article. A pullet is a bird during its first laying year. All birds are subject to an annual moult, when they discard all their feathers before growing new ones. Thus a laying bird is a pullet until it goes into its first annual moult and thereafter is termed a hen. Likewise a male bird is a cockerel until its first annual moult, after which it is referred to as a cock bird.

Time to Buy

The first essential is to know when to buy pullets, and household poultry keepers who lack knowledge of this subject are likely to meet trouble. The main hatching season for poultry is July to October. Heavy-breed birds such as Australorps and Rhode Island Reds are best hatched between July and mid-September; light breeds are hatched satisfactorily up to early October. Pullets hatched later than the months quoted are usually less satisfactory, being slower in growth and late coming into production. Growth and sexual development of

pullets may vary from season to season, but household poultry keepers are recommended to buy birds hatched within the periods named whenever possible and cautioned against buying late-hatched pullets.

The age at which pullets come into production will vary with the season, the way in which the birds have been managed, and to some extent the strain of birds. As a guide it may be assumed that heavy-breed pullets should be in production at about 6½ months of age and light breeds at 5 to 5½ months. For crossbred pullets such as Australorp-White Leghorns the period is similar to that for Leghorns.

In general commercial poultry farmers, from whom pullets are usually bought, tend to retain the earlier-hatched pullets for their own use and in consequence household poultry keepers are often sold September- and October-hatched birds. This means that heavy-breed pullets will not start laying until March and light breeds a month earlier. Many owners are fortunate if their pullets come into lay in these months.

Many household poultry keepers make the serious mistake of omitting to order pullets for the approaching laying season until the end of the year or even well into the new year. By this time most good commercial poultry farmers have either sold all pullets surplus to their own requirements or have booked up for all they

Reminders for May

Winter egg production is the most important of the year. In addition to feeding No. 1 standard laying mash and grain, keep a trough or tin of pure meat meal in front of the birds at all times. Extra meat meal is an aid to winter laying, and the birds will not eat too much of it.

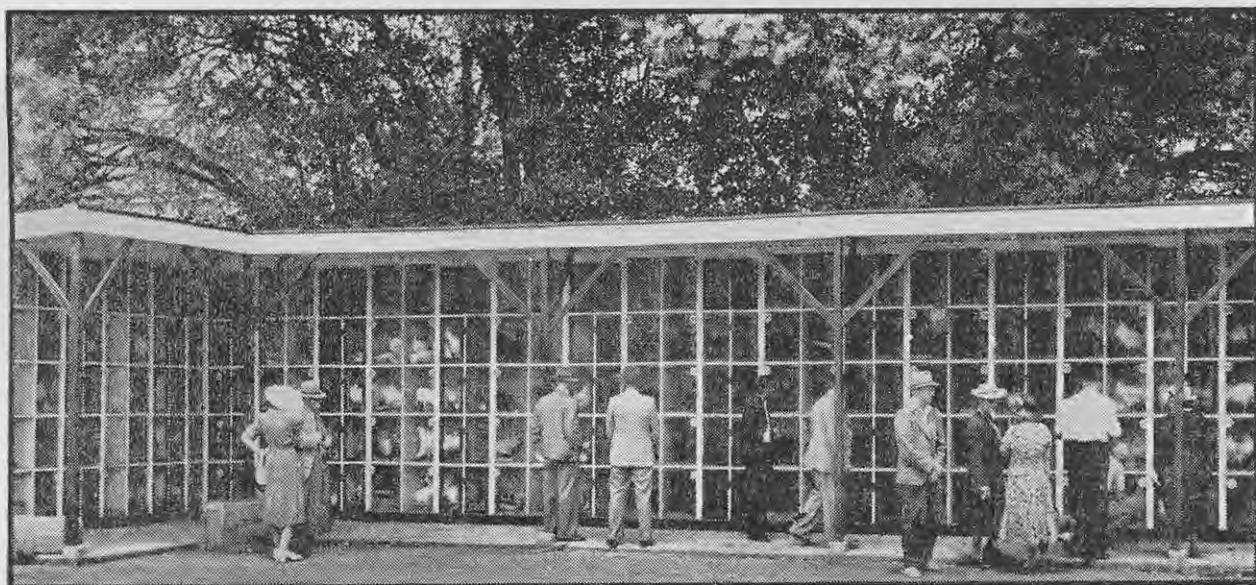
Colds have a serious effect on winter egg production. Coddling the birds or allowing the house to become stuffy may induce colds, but draughts and damp conditions must be prevented and the litter kept dry.

Supplies of good greenfeed may be difficult to maintain at this time of year. Use a fish oil in the mash to give a satisfactory level of vitamin A, the supply of which substantially affects winter laying.

intend to sell. Such pullets as are available at this stage are likely to be late-hatched or poor-quality, slow-developing birds left after the best have been sold. Neither late-hatched nor cull birds are likely to be satisfactory, as the first will come into lay late and thus not produce when eggs are dear, and the second are likely to be lacking in constitution and be poor producers. Consequently poultry keepers are advised to place orders for pullets not later than the beginning of the breeding season—that is, in July.

Age of Pullets

The first stage in the rearing of chicks is brooding them. In general brooding lasts about 6 weeks, during which time the chicks are given heat, the amount being decreased as the birds increase in age. When they are hardened off and away from all heat



A public poultry market, even as well arranged as this one, is not the most satisfactory source of laying birds for the household poultry keeper. Poultry farmers usually dispose of their discarded hens and cull pullets through the markets, and such birds, though they may be quite healthy, are really fit only for the table.