

Management of Household Poultry Runs

MOST household poultry keepers for various reasons consider that providing a run for their small flocks is almost essential. The run is often essential because the housing provided for the birds is totally inadequate, resulting in far too many birds existing in damp, muddy conditions. In this month's article for the household poultry keeper, H. K. Mullins, Poultry Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Hastings, recommends careful planning of the whole unit, including adequate shade.

BACKYARD poultry keeping on the intensive system is still rather a novelty in New Zealand, most householders being firmly convinced that a run, however small, will result in better production. That a warm house with plenty of dry litter for the birds to scratch in is entirely suitable for good production is clearly demonstrated on most commercial poultry farms.

Many commercial poultry keepers have ample room in which to run the birds on the semi-intensive system, but they prefer to keep them totally enclosed for obvious reasons. Production is better, the incidence of disease is lower, and the eggs are much cleaner.

The intensive system necessitates the growing of an adequate supply of greenfeed, but this alone is preferable to permitting the fowls to rely solely on the coarse, rank grass which is the only source of greens on many farms. For the good health of the birds and the good quality of their eggs an adequate supply of fresh, luscious greens is imperative. Silver beet and lawn clippings are an excellent source of greens for household poultry keepers and are readily appreciated by the fowls.



A household poultry house with alternative fowl runs and bushes to provide shade during hot weather.

Though lawn clippings are crisp and fresh in spring, they tend to become too fibrous during summer, and therefore silver beet provides a better source of vitamin A.

Rotating the Run

By rotating the run each year the householder has an excellent means of providing the birds with fresh ground and at the same time of obtaining well-manured ground for gardening. If the poultry house is built in the middle of the garden, it is comparatively easy to alter the run each year without causing inconvenience to the home gardener. Instead of permanent fencing round the run wire netting can be stretched

on wooden frames about 10ft. by 6ft. which can be moved easily and which are supported by stakes driven into the ground. This system is particularly suited to heavy breeds such as Australorps and Rhode Island Reds which are very docile and easily confined.

If a run cannot conveniently be shifted because of the location of the poultry house, it should at least be dug over and limed each autumn. If the run is too small, the vegetation is soon scratched away, the surface becomes brick hard, and rain-water cannot seep away readily. The result is not pleasing in wet

weather to the householder or to neighbours. A neat, dry house with plenty of scratching room will not only provide for more winter eggs, but will give the section a better appearance.

Shelter and Shade

Fowls like outside conditions except in heavy winds, but, like most other animals, they appreciate plenty of shade. Where the birds are run on the semi-intensive system it is advisable to plant in each run trees capable of providing abundant shade.

Fowls become lazy in very hot weather. They may need a drink, but will not bother to leave the shade of the yard to find it, and it is therefore advisable to place drinking vessels and food hoppers under the shade of the trees. Fruit trees, especially citrus trees, provide excellent shade and at the same time benefit considerably from the fowl manure in the run. Ornamental shrubs are also useful for shade, and these are better if they shed their leaves during winter.

Ducks as well as chickens require plenty of shade. Losses of ducklings are sometimes extremely heavy through their being cooped up in hot, sunbaked yards. Perching pullets will receive a setback if consistently exposed in small pens to blazing sunshine. Pullets which do best are those having access to shade in the form of hedges and orchards. This is particularly noticeable in late hatched chickens, which seldom rear as well as the earlier hatched ones.

Every aspect of the poultry project should be carefully planned. If the intensive system is used, the laying house should be of adequate size for keeping all the fowls in for at least part of the year. When the rotational system is followed the equipment should be sound and the ground kept fresh or cultivated.



Fraser Niederer
Fruit trees provide excellent shade in the run.