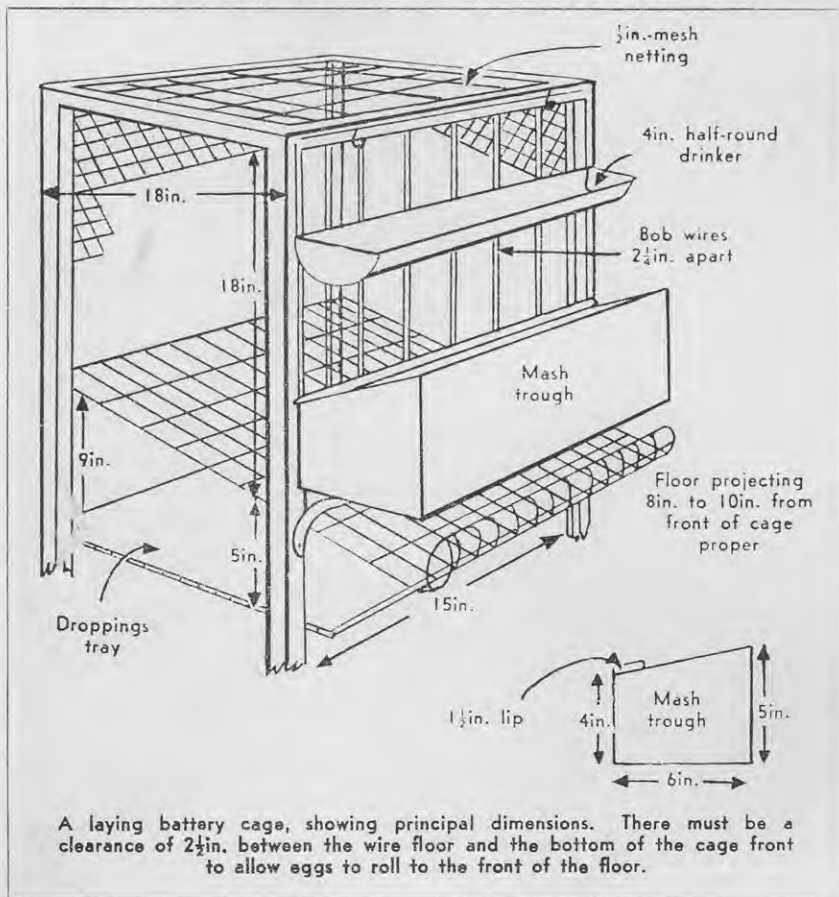


OUTDOOR LAYING CAGES FOR HOUSEHOLD BIRDS



of a shed often makes a suitable wind-break. When a wall or shed is available it is easy to construct a shelter for the cages. The cages should have a hood at the front to help keep out the rain and the sides should extend 6 in. below the floors to prevent direct draughts.

Cages can be bought ready made or, if home made, at least the floors should be purchased. It is difficult to make a first-class floor. A reasonably satisfactory floor can be constructed of ordinary galvanized, 16-gauge, 1 in.-mesh wire netting. The wire should be tightly stretched over 1 in. x 1½ in. framing resting on cross bearers at the back and front of the cage. An extra ½ in. should be allowed in the fall of the floor if it is home made. Any sagging in this netting due to the weight of the birds standing on it will defeat the object of the sloping floor, which is to cause eggs to roll to the front immediately they are laid. Failure in this respect will lead to broken eggs and egg eating.

A removable droppings tray is necessary. This can be cleaned once a week and the manure disposed of in the garden or compost heap. The sides of the tray should be turned up so that when it is removed to be scraped, the droppings do not spill. The tray

should cover the whole area of the egg floor when the cages are tiered. This prevents the birds in the lower and centre cages stretching their heads and pecking the eggs above and also prevents fouling of the feed and water troughs of the lower cages. The distance from the egg floor to the droppings tray should not be less than 4½ in. This allows for a week's accumulation of manure without the cage floor being fouled.

Choice of Stock

When the type of bird to keep in the laying cages is being chosen consideration should be given to either a heavy breed, such as an Australorp or Rhode Island Red, or one of the first crosses now so popular with household poultry keepers in this country. Those most easily bought are the White Leghorn cross Australorp or the reverse cross or the White Leghorn cross Rhode Island Red. However, there is no best breed or cross for cage production. The essential point is that the birds should be bought from a reputable breeder and be bred from good, healthy, and productive stock.

Heavy or crossbred pullets properly managed lay well, particularly in winter, and at the end of their laying

year make good table birds. These breeds are quiet to handle in the cages, being more docile than a light breed such as a White Leghorn.

Broodiness, a characteristic of heavy or crossbred birds, and considered such a nuisance, is not a serious problem when birds are kept in cages. If broodiness occurs, it does not continue for long.

Replacement of Flock

For maximum winter production it is necessary to replace the flock with new pullets annually. A bird's production is greatest during the first or pullet year and if birds are kept for a second year, they are moulting during part of the winter when egg prices are high.

The household poultry keeper is well advised to buy either pullets on lay or perching pullets. The latter are about 8 to 10 weeks of age, hardened off heat, and taught to perch. With cages, however, perching is not important, because the birds do not perch. Rearing day-old chickens is a skilled job and the average householder has not the facilities, equipment, or time to make the buying of day-old chicks worth while.

The ideal perching pullets are those ordered from hatchings in August for heavy breeds and September for cross-breeds, delivery being taken 8 to 10 weeks later. Because of the heavy demand for stock hatched in those months orders should be placed 6 months before the pullets are wanted. If spare cages are available, birds of different ages can be kept without mixing. Very often birds of different ages are mixed together with detrimental results caused by the older and more advanced birds bullying and pecking the younger ones.

The cage system has been referred to as a cruel method of keeping poultry. This idea has been entirely exploded. On the question of cruelty the following points should be considered.

1. Every bird is closely supervised and under constant observation. A sick or ailing bird can be seen immediately and treated or culled.

2. Bullying is eliminated.

3. Food and water supplies are adequate and birds feed readily.

4. Compare their sanitary conditions with those of birds kept in unhygienic sheds and runs.

5. The final test—egg production is excellent and the health of the birds good.

If birds were being treated cruelly, it is most unlikely that they would remain healthy, eat well, and produce heavily. There is no cruelty when birds are managed and fed properly in cages.

Feeding and management in cages are to be discussed in a later article.