

POULTRY NOTES

(By MR. G. H. AMBLER, Christchurch.)

MODEL BACKYARD POULTRY RUNS

(Continued from December 27).

If the poultry-keeper has a spare piece of oil-cloth this will be found a suitable substitute for the sacking, and can be treated in exactly the same way. Tarred felt is occasionally used as a covering, but this is a trifle expensive, whereas tarred sacking or oilcloth whilst answering the same purpose will naturally save the pocket. Coarse brown paper can also be used. Both sides should be tarred and the top sprinkled with sand. No matter what material is used it should be tarred at least once a year; in fact the oftener it is tarred, the longer it will last.

Proper Ventilation.

To return to the sleeping house. A few words must be said on the "ventilation" question. Unless the house is properly ventilated we can look for nothing but ill results; without proper ventilation the occupants of the poultry house cannot remain healthy. "Vitality" we must have in our fowls, and if the ventilation of the sleeping house is good, then this vitality must follow, all other conditions prevailing. Proper ventilation can be obtained by several methods. Six or seven holes bored at the top of the door will suffice, but the following method is perhaps the best: As a top ventilator a fairly large aperture should be first covered with perforated zinc from the inside, and over this should be made a sliding door fitted with glass. The aperture can then be left wide open on close nights and partially shut on others, according to weather conditions, as we shall require a thorough current of pure air to drive out the foul air through the above ventilator. This bottom ventilator should be placed as far away as possible from the top ventilator, and the latter should be well above the heads of the fowls as they roost. By the above arrangement we provide a pure current of air throughout the night without draughts, and that is what is wanted. An inspection in the morning when the fowls are let out will signify whether the ventilation provided is sufficient or not. If the air is stuffy more ventilation is needed. We next turn to the "accommodation" question. It is generally calculated that a fair-sized fowl will require ten cubic feet. Thus a house six feet long, four feet wide, and five feet high will equal 6 x 4 x 5 cubic feet, and be large enough to comfortably accommodate up to a dozen fowls. The run cannot be too large; the more space allowed the better the result.

Perch and Dropboards.

I will now deal with the perches. These should be 2 or 2½ inches in width, and the corners should be slightly rounded off on both sides. They should be the full length or width of the house and fit loosely into the slots prepared for them. They are thus easily removed for cleaning purposes—an item that should be very frequently carried out. Cleanliness should not be neglected; it is essential. For this reason dropping boards should be used under the perches. They may be fixed to the perches or placed directly under them. These also will require an occasional scrubbing with soap and water. The majority of small poultry keepers pay far too little attention to "cleanliness." For fowls to roost in a warm house with several days' accumulation of excreta lying but a few inches below them, does not conduce to good health and egg production, but rather the reverse. A piece of ordinary tarred roofing felt or sacking, cut to the exact size of the dropping board, and placed over it, will save a lot of time and trouble. A little sand or litter should be scattered over this each night; and every morning the felt must be taken up and the droppings shaken on to the garden, or, better still, stored away. A few

strokes with a birch broom is sometimes necessary to complete the process, when the layer of felt or other material can be replaced. It will be convenient for this reason to keep a little brush and small pail of sand or other litter always hanging in an odd corner of the house.

Nest Boxes.

Opinions as to the best nest boxes are many and various. For my own part I like a cheese box with enough of the rim trimmed off till it is three or four inches deep. However, very little fault can be found with the orange box, which is divided into partitions ready for use. Fine hay should form the nesting material, and this should be changed every month, or more frequently if possible, when a little disinfectant powder should be sprinkled in the boxes. Orange boxes are to be recommended as nest boxes, as they can be replaced by others when occasion arises, only costing a few pence from the greengrocer's. Nest boxes should always be placed in the darkest corner of the sleeping house, as some fowls never feel comfortable unless they are so positioned, much preferring to drop their eggs in the run, which may very easily cause egg-eating amongst the hens. Young pullets, too, may be found to take to the nests much earlier when the latter are placed in a dark corner.

Real Moss for Fowl Houses.

I don't know if peat moss is obtainable in New Zealand or not; if so there is nothing better for keeping houses free from offensive smells. The floor of the house should be covered with it to the thickness of four or five inches. It should be broken up into small pieces, and the nest boxes may be lined with it as well. Besides being a deodorizer, it is an absorbent. It should be raked over every two or three days, else it is apt to get caked together. If there is a good depth of peat moss to start with, and it is well turned over it will serve its purpose for months. I am of the opinion that it is far better to allow mother earth to form the flooring of the sleeping house, over which peat moss or other litter can be scattered. Concrete floors are not to my liking. Where the soil is always loose the top layer can occasionally be taken off and a fresh lot added to the depth of six or seven inches. In cases where the poultry-keeper cannot afford peat moss, refuse from chaff-cutting mills, dry leaves, or wheat hulls will make a good substitute.

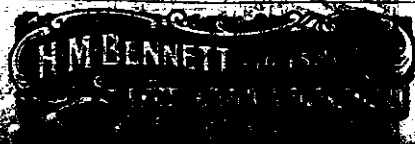
Location of House.

The location of the house and run will depend entirely upon the shape of the garden site. Where it is possible the covered-in run should be facing the north and the sleeping place the west, the run meeting the house in the corner. Then we have a snug little house and run. In such cases the roof of the sleeping compartment should slope away from the run and not into it. In any case it is wise to remember that a gutter to carry off the rain is most essential. The edge of the roof should be carried well over the fronts of both house and run.

I have written at some length on the building of the poultry house and run because success or failure depends quite as much on the proper housing of one's fowls as on the proper feeding of them. The ideal house is one with "plenty of room, light and sunshine, fresh air without draughts, movable fixtures, convenient, and built for comfort." Should it be necessary to prevent draught from coming through any cracks, paste brown paper over the opening (inside) and apply gas tar to the paper. Remember that poultry houses should be built as high as possible, six or seven feet being a convenient height. The run should be the same height, to allow the poultry-keeper to have easy access for cleaning purposes, etc.

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