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Poultry Chat

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Helen Vialoux, Charleswood

April, the month of "Spring smiles and mud puddles," and best of all, the glorious awakening of Mother Nature after her long sleep. All the information gleaned during the winter, in regard to poultry keeping must be put into practice this month if we are to keep up the slogan: "A hundred hens to each farm, and one egg a day to be eaten by each man, woman and child in Canada," and yet have two hundred million dozen eggs for export. Fancy, seventy-five million hens on our Canadian farms! Not counting back-yard poultry flocks in the cities which are yearly increasing.

Mr. F. C. Elford, chief of the poultry department, Ottawa, gave some most interesting figures to the Canadian Produce Association convention at Hamilton, Ont., recently. At present we have about 55 million head of poultry in Canada on our farms, working out at 73 hens per 100 acres. Therefore, at the present rate of increase, it will not be long before we shall have gained the objective set by the Dominion Poultry Council. The western provinces are forging ahead rapidly in poultry production, and no doubt when commercial hatcheries are established, farmers will raise many more chicks throughout Canada. The season is so late in some parts of the Dominion that the average farmer finds it impossible to raise early profitable pullets. So far the only really large hatchery is at Hamilton, where the Canadian Chick Hatchery has three mammoth incubators which are turning out thirty-one thousand chicks each 21 days during the season. When baby chicks can be secured by all who need them, and people learn how to raise them properly, the poultry industry will "hum" and our national debt will vanish. In the meantime we should make the best use of our old-time methods and set our chickens and run an incubator as well. There is now much excellent information in chick rearing and incubation in all our papers, and bulletins on every phase of poultry raising can be secured by dropping a post card to any of the Agricultural College centres or the Experimental Farm, Ottawa. Fertile eggs for hatching must be secured if good hatches and healthy chicks are looked for. Select only healthy birds for the breeding pen. A dozen good birds of your best type and breed will lay enough eggs to hatch out a fine large flock of chicks. Secure a vigorous well bred male to mate with them. A cockerel with old hens, and a cock with pullets. Feed dry grains rather than mashes giving them plenty of vegetable matter and grit and a little green cut bone if available. This winter it has been impossible to get alfalfa meal, so, I empty the hay bins of the seeds and chaff and steam a pail of it for the hens sometimes.

A good dose of epsom salts given in bran-mash at roosting time, one pound of salts to 100 hens, adding a little ground ginger, and some salt will tone up the flock in the spring. Give them this dose two or three times during the breeding season, and see the hens have plenty of fresh water to drink next day. The biddies will soon begin to sing and lay hatchable eggs with a good shell. Charcoal is also most necessary for good health. My birds pick all they require from the wood ashes, but the granulated charcoal can easily be added to their dry mash of crushed oats and bran etc.

Some April hints in regard to turkeys, ducks and geese, may be useful to our readers. Turkeys should never be closely related to secure good strong "turks" as the young fry are called, therefore, in-breeding must never be resorted to. The hens are at their best at two or three years of age. One gobbler may be mated to a dozen hens and may be kept for several years if he does not become too

cross. Sometimes, they become quite vicious and will attack chicken with their claws. Place an old barrel on its side, or fix up a large nest box about the farm yard and dame turkey will usually lay in these nests instead of stealing away to her nest in the bush, as she is wont to do. Of course the nest should be made inviting, with straw or hay to entice the shy bird into it. A turkey often lays a large number of eggs, therefore the first 8 or 9 eggs can be stolen from her nest and given to a broody hen to hatch, always leave her one or two eggs, so she will not become disheartened. She will cover 13 eggs nicely. Do not disturb her when she is sitting, especially during the last week of incubation. Turkey eggs take 28 days to hatch and are very fertile, as a rule. Turkeys have a single mating for each quota of eggs, and will lay a second lot when the first hatch of turks is 6 weeks old, however, this is too late for incubation, but turkey eggs are delicious, more delicate in flavor than the eggs of the other domestic fowl. One boiled turkey egg makes an ideal breakfast. Young turks need care in feeding, and must be kept from dampness in the chilly spring mornings, otherwise, I have found turkeys easy to rear and very profitable. The coyotes which prowl about in many sections of the country, taking toll from the farm flock of turkeys, prevent many persons going into turkey raising.

The popular breeds of geese are the Embden, Toulouse, and African, all of large size, easily raised and fattened. Considerable room is needed for raising geese, and they will soon gobble up a garden if allowed access to it. One gander mated to several geese, is the rule, and geese should be mated in the fall, birds two years old and over, making the best breeders. When a goose marches about in the spring holding bits of straw or hay in her bill, provide a nest for her of soft straw, in which she can dig and hide her eggs, which are very large. She lays 12 to 15 eggs before setting, and these should be removed from her nest daily as they easily chill. Leave a couple of dummy eggs in the nest. The mother goose should be well fed whilst sitting and the gander should be kept away in a run by himself. Incubation takes from 26 to 29 days, and hatching 48 hours. The goslings should be removed from the nest as they hatch and placed in a flannel lined basket until all the eggs are hatched. The gander helps the mother look after the goslings during their early days, and defends them from all harm. Goslings should be fed bread crumbs, greens, bran and shorts, and boiled potatoes mixed with milk and grit, during the first two weeks. After that they run with their mother and require little care if given a good mash feed at night.

Ducks are also easily reared and make a quick profit. Do not raise them near a river, however, unless they are yarded as they will surely "float off" just when they are ready to be potted and turned into money. Ducks do not really need water to swim in except at breeding time, then they should have their liberty and find plenty of little ditches and ponds on the farm to swim in, at that season of the year. Several breeds are popular, and the Pekin is a handsome bird of large size. Personally, I prefer the Indian Runner duck, or a cross between the Pekin and Runner duck, many more eggs are laid by this breed, they are easily reared, and fatten quickly, the flesh is of fine flavor. When ducks are laying keep them in the coop until 10 or 11 a.m. as they drop their eggs anywhere. One drake mates with 4 to 8 females, and care should be taken of hatching eggs, as they chill very readily. A large hen will hatch ducklings even better than a duck. Time of incubation 27 to 29 days. If under a hen sprinkle with warm water the last week of incubation. Do not feed for 36 hours, and give the same bill of fare as the goslings need at first: green food is essential. Milk and water in a shallow dish makes the best drink. Be careful of chilling ducklings in the spring rains.

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