"GUESS MY AGE," SAID THE CHICKEN

BY MICHAEL K. BOYER.

For some reason or other poultry writers steer clear of the subject of determining the age of fowls. They may not know of a method, or they may be afraid of advancing their pet theories. I don't know that I blame them, for I have searched and searched the poultry books and magazines but can find nothing, or very little, that might be taken as a guide.

Once in a great while I have gathered a little data, and I have been on the lookout for a number of years. It may be that there is no way; but then, on second thought, why shouldn't there be? If we can tell a horse's age by his teeth, why not the hen's by some outstanding mark?

First, there are the spurs. For years folks relied on the size of the spurs. But I have found that that does not always hold good; besides, it is seldom we find a hen with spurs, and we are more concerned with the hen's age than we are with the cock's.

In looking over some old English writings, I find that the old English Game hens sported spurs just like the males, and some of the five-toed breeds of hens found in Kent, Sussex and Surrey had spurs, and even do to-day. Anyway, this spur business applies to the male sex, and in exceptional cases to the female sex.

ANALYZING THE SPUR.

The spur, like the horn of an animal, rests on a bony part—the core—and is covered by a bony sheath which increases more or less in length every year. But the growth of the spur can be hastened, or it can be checked or retarded by some accident. I had a cockerel that showed a spur large enough for a two-year-old bird; and I also owned a cock in which the spur never advanced beyond the cockerel stage. So there was no telling the age by the spurs in those birds.

Ordinarily, however, a cockerel that is not over five months old seldom has any spur, but if we look closely we find a scale that is somewhat larger than the others, at a point where the spur is to grow. In time this scale rises, and a knob is formed, at the centre of which there is a clearly defined point.

When a cockerel is seven months old this spur may be one-eighth of an inch long, and four months later it will be about five-eighths of an inch in length, generally straight, with a rounded end.

At two years of age, this spur may measure from one inch to one and one-eighth inches, with a curve upwards or downwards. A year later it may be from one and three-eighths to one and one-half inches, and have a curve, the end usually turning upward.

The growth of the spur continues all through life, but the quickest advance is made during the latter part of the cockerel age. After the third year the growth is very slow, but the spur becomes harder and thinner. I have had cock birds which, when four years old, had very long spurs, and in some cases these spurs curved or rolled upon themselves. So while spurs may be our best guess in determining age, there still is no absolute guarantee.

The next clue I discovered was the color of the leg. This is supposed to vary with age—a black leg becoming bluish, a yellow leg becoming pink or white, a gray or mottled leg becoming blue, and a pink leg turning red. The turkey leg is black when the fowls are young, but it reddens conspicuously as the bird grows older. The red color shows that the bird is no longer young, but how old it does not tell. And in the case of the yellow-leg hen, the white or pale leg may indicate age, or the pale color may be due to heavy egg production, as authorities on culling would have us believe.

We do know that with pullets the scales of the legs are smooth, shiny, fine, hardly visible, very soft to the touch and hugging closely and firmly to the leg. But each year these scales become wider and longer, and rise little by little, until finally they become hard and tough. Yet while by these scales we can distinguish the hen from the pullet, we have no guide to show us the years-old of the hen.

Along comes a Canadian writer who tells us to look at the skin. If the flank feathers of a young hen are pushed apart, he says, a silky, long, light, extremely-thin down will be seen growing fairly regular between the other feathers, which cover all parts of the body. He says the skin is of a uniform tissue, fine and pink, covered with a network of very fine, bluish veins. When the hen is over a year old the down and veins have disappeared, and the skin is of a dull white color, dry, not so smooth or elastic, and somewhat mealy.

A GOOD METHOD.

Here is a method which appeared in print some years ago, which sounds good: A six-months-old pullet, and even until it is 14 months old, will have the first secondary feather in its wing, near the axile feathers, shorter than the rest, and the quill will be more central, bending in a short point, slightly prominent.

There is but one secondary feather on each wing presenting these characteristics until the next molt, after which the second feather is also shorter than the others.

In other words, after the fall molt, when the fowl is one and one-half years old (by which time the feathers are fully developed), there will be found two secondary feathers having the characteristic markings, although the bird completes its second year only the following spring.

After the second molt—that is, when three or coming three years old—there are three shorter feathers in each wing. After each succeeding molt one more feather comes in shorter.

What is your method for determining a fowl's age?

THE SANDS OF TIME

"Grannie," said Julia, running into the house excitedly, "Mrs. Eastman says she doesn't want any more of her gooseberries, and that if you care for what are left on the bushes you are welcome to them."

"That's very kind of Mrs. Eastman," said Grannie, looking up from her sewing. "We shall certainly enjoy the jam. You'd better go over now, Julie; they ought to be picked at once. Take the big basket that hangs under the stairs and a strawberry basket. Then you can pick into the small basket and empty into the larger one."

Julia's face fell. "Do I have to pick all the gooseberries, Grannie? There are lots of bushes, and they're so prickly!"

"You like the jam, don't you, dear?" answered Grannie, "and I'm going to make the jam, you know."

"Yes, Grannie, I do," said Julia, giving her a hug and kiss, "and I'll pick every one of them, you'll see, and I won't grumble another bit!" And off she ran.

But when she got to Mrs. Eastman's gardens and counted the bushes—ten of them—and looked at all the berries hanging among the prickly branches, she didn't feel quite so courageous. She started on the bush nearest and picked a few berries. Then she lifted up the branches, one by one, to see how many more berries were hiding underneath. Then she heaved a little sigh and set to work again. Somehow the little basket seemed to fill very slowly, and she couldn't help thinking how many more bushes there were after this one, and the task seemed endless.

Just then Mrs. Eastman came into the garden, holding a queerly-shaped glass. It was round and flat on top and bottom like a circle, and sloped to the middle from both ends, like two funnels meeting in a point, and one part seemed full of fine sand.

"Here's an hourglass, Julia," she said. "Perhaps it will make the picking easier. It takes the sand just an hour to run down from the top half to the bottom through the narrow space between. Watch it run. It doesn't hurry but it doesn't stop. It just keeps right on and on, a few sands at a time, and almost before you know it, all the sands have run through, the hour has gone, you turn the glass upside down, and the sands start running again."

Julia took the glass and watched the sands falling, a few at a time.

"They just keep right on, don't they?" she said. "What is it for, Mrs. Eastman?"

"It was used for counting time before there were any clocks," answered Mrs. Eastman. "We'll set it on this stump where you can watch the sands run while you pick. When they have run out, you can turn the glass over and they'll start afresh."

So Julia started picking again with the hourglass for company, and things did go much better. Instead of counting the bushes or looking at the unpicked berries, she tried to keep up with the hourglass. In no time at all, it seemed, the little basket was full. Twice she turned the hourglass. But before it needed another turn, the bushes were empty and there were seven quarts of lovely gooseberries in the big basket.

"It was fun, too, Grannie," she said, as she showed the basket and told about the hourglass. "I wish we had one."

"Now that I think of it," said Grannie, "I believe there is an hourglass in an old chest up in the attic. We'll have to find it." And they did.

Julia used it again when she topped and tailed the berries for Grannie. And when the jam was made, she took Mrs. Eastman a jar and told her what fun it was keeping up with "the sands of time."

Fun in the Old Swimming Hole.

Boys, did you ever talk or sing under water? It is great sport and another boy will be able to hear you very plainly quite some distance away.

Here's how it is done. Place a wide-mouth pail over your head and sink down into fairly shallow water. The air in the pail will keep out the water and have a tendency to pull you to the surface again, so it is necessary to hold on to a rock or something at the bottom of the pond. Now start to sing in loud, clear tones, or call out the other boy's name. When this boy puts his head under the water some distance from you he will hear the song or his name very distinctly, as water is a very good conductor of sound waves.

Candy Girls at Our Fair.

When the Woman's Club in our town asked the Girl Guides to take charge of the candy table at their annual fair last year, we thought it was going to be a tremendous task. We held a meeting to discuss ways and means, and while we were trying to think up a new kind of booth to build, Frances Alcock had a brilliant idea.

"Why have a booth at all?" she asked. "I've noticed that the girls who take the candy round among the crowd in baskets, as they so often do, sell lots more than we who stay behind the counter. Why don't we plan to sell ours that way?"

And that's what we did.

Seven of the girls were asked to be sales girls and circulate among the crowd with their wares. Each girl wore a costume, and the idea made a great hit. Marge Smith was the cutest little Chinese girl, with her smooth black hair, with two huge paper chrysanthemums tucked behind her ears and wearing Miss Sear's lovely red Mandarin evening coat. She sold T'ang Hu La, the candy the Chinese children love to buy. We read about it at the library and then made it ourselves as near like theirs as we could. It consists of several pieces of candied fruit and nuts run onto little sticks. We used toothpicks, candied cherries, dates and walnuts.

The girl who sold the pralines was dressed like a colored mammy, with a big gay apron and a bandanna. She blackened her face. We just asked the folks who were going to make fudge to drop it in round wafers instead of making it in squares for her to sell.

Maud Perkins made the prettiest Scottish lassie, with plaid skirt and short stockings, and she sold "toffies," which included caramels. Another girl dressed in a short white dress, with long curls, a blue sash and socks, was a French doll and sold bon bons.

Frances was the hit of the evening in her cambric parka and hood, as an Eskimo. A girl in a Swiss costume, a full red cheesecloth skirt, white blouse and black bodice, sold sweet chocolate. And we made the Turkish paste that Mabel Elliot, in scarlet trousers and fez, sold from her tray. It was not hard. The recipe called for a box of gelatin, a cupful and a third of water, two cupfuls of sugar and half a cupful of fruit juice. To make it, bring two-thirds of a cupful of water and the sugar to a boil and add the gelatin soaked in the rest of the water for a few minutes, and boil slowly for twenty minutes. Add the fruit juice, turn into a tin pan wet with cold water and let stand overnight, or until firm. Dip the pan in hot water, turn out on a board, cut in squares and roll in powdered sugar.

Some of us used orange juice with the grated peel and some lemon juice and made a pretty yellow paste. Strawberry juice made pink paste, and one of the girls colored hers green with vegetable coloring.—Ella Peabody.

Does Trap-Nesting Pay?

One of the important matters which every commercial poultryman must decide at some time in his career is that of whether or not to install and use trapnests. The decision is often the turning point around which a large poultry business builds success or failure.

If one can first determine what trap-nesting will cost and second what it will return, the answer should be fairly easy.

Trap-nesting is costly where any great number of hens is concerned. The nests cost considerably more, and more are usually required for each 100 hens, because the traps are visited only at stated times, and a hen cannot leave the nest when she pleases, but must wait to be released.

The time involved in making the regular trips to the trap-nests is considerable, even under the most efficient arrangement. It is not unreasonable to say that the number of hens one man can properly care for will be reduced at least one-half if he decides to use trap-nests.

From trap-nesting one gets a very nearly accurate record of the exact number of eggs laid by each hen in the flock.

This makes possible a careful sorting of the hens on the basis of actual performance. However, except from the standpoint of one who is trying to learn how to judge hens, it is questionable whether trap-nesting for this purpose is worth while or worth anywhere near what it costs.

When one adds the cost of leg bands, record forms and additional clerical work it is clear that the cost of getting a trap-nest record is high. Unless the record is used as part of a definite pedigree-breeding program it has little value.

Hens can be sorted for production with a very fair degree of accuracy without the use of trap-nests; and in the long run it is infinitely more important to know what kind of sons and daughters a hen will produce than to know how many eggs she herself will lay.

Summer plowing is not a pleasant subject—that is, if you have to use horses. The stubble ground is most always hard, the weather is hot and the flies are bad. A tractor doesn't mind hard ground and hot weather—and if it is a good tractor, there are no flies on it. The point is, though, ground for fall wheat ought to be plowed as early as possible. The later you wait, the lower the yield will be next year. Now, do as we say and plow early.

THE CANADIAN HOMEMAKER

A series of weekly articles covering

PLANNING . BUILDING . FINANCING
DECORATING . FURNISHING . GARDENING

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REAL SEMI-BUNGALOWS

By Richards & Abra, Architects.

Many homes are called semi-bungalows simply because their exterior appearance suggests that the habitable second floor area is not equal to that of the first. Really, with the exception of this rather insignificant detail, they are to all intents and purposes two storey houses absolutely lacking in any form of semblance to bungalows. When one remembers that the chief characteristic of the latter type of home is ground floor bedrooms, the why and wherefore of the application of the term semi-bungalow to any one and a half or two storey houses having all the bedrooms on the second floor is a bit perplexing.

The floor plans for this house show that one of the bedrooms and a bathroom are on the ground floor. There are two more bedrooms and another bathroom on the second floor, so that while the bungalow idea is not quite getting an "even break" it is at least a compromise and one which assures much comfort and convenience.

The foundation of stone or concrete is finished off with a dressed stone course above grade. The walls from the top of this stone course to the cornice line are veneer construction in rug or tapestry brick with white stucco gables. Stained cedar shingles laid on asbestos paper provide an attractive and serviceable roof.

The central entrance opens into a good sized stair hall which gives direct access to the living and dining rooms.

The kitchen is well lighted and laid out for the convenient arrangement of cupboards, refrigerator, etc., and also has convenient and direct access to the front door. Opening off the vestibule is an outside lighted and ventilated coat cupboard.

The living room opens into a good sized verandah, and the ground floor bedroom has conveniently arranged cupboard and bathroom, and is very suitable for the owners' room.

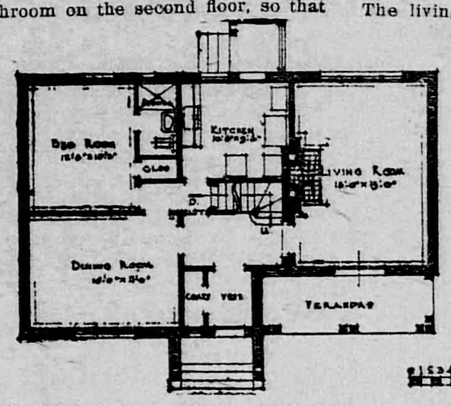
On the first floor the bedrooms are fairly roomy and have good cupboards and ready access to the second bathroom.

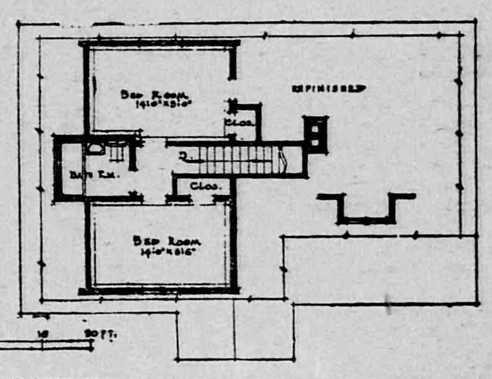
There are hardwood floors throughout with good pine finish suitable for paint or enamel.

Bathrooms are fitted with tile floors and dadoes and good quality built-in fixtures.

The dimensions of this desirable home are 25 ft. x 41 ft. and including hot water heating the approximate cost is $7,500.

Readers desiring further information regarding the plans and specifications of this house should communicate with the architects direct. Address, Messrs. Richards & Abra, 126 Sparks Street, Ottawa, Ont.





Boy Fodder in a Barrel.

Clams, green corn, fish, potatoes, game and almost anything good to eat can be cooked in a barrel after this fashion: Find a clean barrel and wash it. Gather clean grass or something of that nature that will not give the food a bad taste. If it is dry, wet it. Build a good-size fire and heat enough stones to fill the barrel about one-quarter to one-third full. Place a thick layer of grass in the bottom of the barrel. Drop the stones in with a pitchfork or shovel. Keep a layer of grass between the hot stones and the sides of the barrel so as not to burn the wood. Cover the stones thickly with more grass. Put in a layer of corn or game, or whatever you have to cook. If there are several kinds of grub, put in a layer of each, with layers of grass between. Fill the barrel and cover it with two or three thicknesses of burlap or other heavy cloth. Tack it tight around the edges. In a few minutes the barrel will be spouting steam from every crack. In an hour boy fodder will be done to a turn. Potatoes and meat need more cooking. Enough food for twenty boys can be cooked in one barrel.

When to Sell Cockerels.

A somewhat novel test has been tried out at Cap Rouge, Que., experimental station. The object was to ascertain whether it pays better to sell surplus cockerels as broilers, as fryers, or as roasters. For three years forty-five cockerels of broiler size, from 1½ to 2 pounds each were put aside each season. Fifteen were sold immediately, fifteen were kept until they averaged about four pounds each and the balance were sold around the middle of November. The fryers and the roasters respectively gave for the fifteen 80 cents and 5.43 more profit than the broilers. Dr. G. A. Langelier, the superintendent of the station, in his report for 1925, says that though it is too early to arrive at definite conclusions it must not be forgotten that no account was taken of housing room or of the poultryman's labor; also the average price of 48 cents per pound for broilers on July 12 was low compared with 31 cents for fryers on August 27 and 26 cents for roasters on November 15. Awaiting further data Dr. Langelier suggests that farmers would probably do better to sell all surplus cockerels at as early a date as possible.

SOME INGENIOUS HINTS AND DEVICES

Try sweeping the stairs with a painter's brush instead of an ordinary dusting brush and note the difference.

Sew small chamois leather to the centre of a dusting cloth.

Articles drawn up by tape or elastic are usually tiresome to wash. This is easily obviated by putting a small safety-pin at each end of the elastic, the article can then be drawn out to full length and ironed. The pins will serve as bodkins to draw the tape as required.

Boil new clotheslines before using them. They will last longer.

Get an old sunshade or umbrella, strip off the cover, enamel the frame white, and hang it by the handle, from a hook in the ceiling, over your cooker or range. You have a splendid drier or airer which will hold a large quantity of collars, handkerchiefs, etc. It can be closed when not in use.

When dyeing stockings or socks also put into the dye a small quantity of darning wool.

To make mint sauce quickly and easily sprinkle with granulated sugar before chopping.

A piece of zinc nailed over half the kitchen table, makes an excellent surface for chopping onions, etc., and can be easily cleaned.

Try adding mustard to butter before spreading sandwiches.

Mildew on cheese can be prevented if a lump of sugar is placed in the cheese dish. If a piece of cheese is carefully wrapped in a cloth wrung out in vinegar it will neither dry nor gather mold.

To make boiled bacon really delicious, add to the water a teaspoonful of vinegar, 2 cloves and a nutmeg.

To keep a doorstep white in wet weather use plaster of paris instead of whitening.

To prolong the wear of gloves place a small piece of cotton wool in the tip of each finger and thumb.

To prevent jams growing moldy on top soak the parchment rounds in milk.

To prevent milk from burning sprinkle a little sugar over the bottom of the pan before putting in the milk.

To stop cabbage from boiling over put a piece of butter or dripping the size of a walnut into the water as soon as it comes to a boil.

To prevent soiling the woodwork when cleaning brass knockers, etc., make a shield of stiff cardboard by cutting a hole the same size and shape as the brass plate.

To prevent cakes from burning place a shallow tin filled with salt at the bottom of the oven when baking.

To loosen glass stoppers, rusty screws, etc., pour on a little vinegar, then turn sharply.

To hide an isolated fruit stain on a fresh tablecloth cover with a piece of white stamp paper.

Lemons will keep fresh for a considerable time if covered with water which is changed daily.

Paint can be removed from windows with hot vinegar. Paint brushes which have become hard will soften if immersed in hot vinegar.

To prevent grease from splashing when frying put a piece of bread in the pan and fry at the same time.

If a little common salt is put round the top of a candle before lighting, it will not drip at all.

If one has cracked eggs on hand and no time to poach them, wrap them in a twist of tissue paper and boil in the usual way.

The dirtiest frying-pan will come clean if soaked for a few minutes in ammonia and water.

To prevent salt lumps in a shaker place a few grains of rice in the shaker.

To prevent silver from tarnishing put a few pieces of camphor into the drawer.

To save time in hunting for spools of cotton, thread them all on a wire (ordinary cotton-covered wire not string) and form into circle. Thus every thickness and color is at hand, and the thread will run quite easily.

The grinding of the food in the gizzard may be heard by placing the ear close to the body of the fowl at night, while it is on the roost.

Why does paper roofing wrinkle so after it is laid? Here is what one man thinks about it and how he deals with the difficulty: The wrinkling is due to heat expansion after the paper has been put on. To prevent this, cut the strips, lay them in the sun to stretch for a few hours, then put them on and you have a roof that will not wrinkle.