

RESCUED HENS: A WONDERFUL READER'S TALE TO INSPIRE YOU!

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Hours of interest

It was with great interest that I read the article *Seasonal Fayre* (PP129). I found it most enjoyable.

However, there are three questions that I'd like to ask to you: The article mentioned the critical day length for layers, and that the hormonal egg stimulation ceases due to shorter days and longer nights in autumn/winter. You recommend that additional lighting could be put in place to mimic a longer day. I'd like to know what the critical day length for egg stimulation in laying chickens is, and from what months onwards I would need to apply the supplementary lighting to reach this critical day length in hours?

I've got LED lights which require very little energy, but I wonder if they also transmit the right wavelength? Surely, light quantity is one thing, but light quality (the right wavelength) is another; or am I making things too complicated?

There's also a section which mentions that feeding chickens solely on free range pellets is sufficient, as long as each bird gets its 100-150g a day. What I'd like to know is whether I should mix pellets with corn, feed corn only or just pellets? Does one exclude the other?

Finally, I know that Defra forbids feeding animals with kitchen waste, such as leftovers from meals and cooking. However, I've not understood the rationale behind this rule. I can understand that the salt and sugar content of 'our food' might not match the requirements of chickens, but are there any other reasons behind this regulation that I'm not aware of?

Once again, thank you for the thought-provoking article.

Markus Radscheit, via email

Research suggests that the optimum day length to stimulate egg laying in hens is 15 hours. While most pure-bred hens will stop laying when day length is less than 15 hours, some hybrids will continue to lay through the winter, but at a reduced rate.

Artificial light can be provided in the hen house to encourage hens to lay through the shorter day of winter. Any additional hours of light should be provided in the mornings, using a simple light controlled by a timer. This will allow the hens can go through the natural roosting process as dusk falls in the evening.

The light should be hung in the centre of the house, so that the largest possible area of the house is illuminated. The best light to use is one which mimics the spectrum of sunlight; normal



Artificial light in the hen house should be provided at the start of the day, not at the end.

incandescent bulbs, halogen lights that produce a yellow-coloured light and warm-white fluorescent lights all work well.

It's important to remember that every hen is hatched with the number of eggs she will lay in her lifetime already predetermined by the number of eggs in her ovary. So, although providing artificial light may prolong her laying season, it will not increase her lifetime

productivity. All that'll happen is that she'll be laying more of her potential egg output in a shorter space of time.

Layers pellets should be fed as a complete feed on a 'free access' basis. The addition of a little mixed corn as a scattered treat is fine, but it should be fed separately late in the afternoon so that the hens have had all day to eat sufficient pellets to meet their nutritional needs.



Hanging dried corn on the cob proved a popular pecking treat.

Corn shouldn't be mixed in with the pellets as many hens will simply pick out the grains in preference to the pellets. This can lead to hens eating too much corn, which can unbalance their diet and adversely affect the quality and quantity of eggs produced.

Not only is human food unsuitable for chickens in terms of its nutritional content, but Defra laws prohibit the feeding of any catering waste which includes any food from domestic kitchens, to livestock and poultry.

This broad ban was introduced in the aftermath of the outbreak of Foot & Mouth disease in 2001, to try to prevent further disease outbreaks. Even vegetarian kitchen waste is banned, as it could potentially be contaminated with meat products. The following link to Defra's website should hopefully clarify this further for you:

www.gov.uk/supplying-and-using-animal-by-products-as-farm-animal-feed
Joanna Palmer, Nutritionist, Allen & Page

Simple treat

In the winter months, when the foxes are hungrier, my hens (two Cheshire Blues and two Warrens) spend more time in the enclosed run than out in the garden. I always try to provide interest in the run, including various things for them to peck at.

On a recent holiday to France, the owners of the gite had hung out dried cobs of corn for birds to feed on. This struck me as a nice treat

for my girls to hang in their outdoor run.

I bought an unpackaged corn-on-the-cob and peeled back the green leaves, tying them together to form a loop for hanging. I then hung the cob in a dry and ventilated area (from the roof of the run) until the corn had dried.

Once dried and hung in pecking position, it proved very popular!
Leo Risley, Cheshire.

Neighbourhood watch

With regard to the letter from Linda Barker in the October issue (PP129), my neighbour has one of the egg monitoring machines she described, although I'm not sure if it is actually a Buddy.

However, uses his for checking parrot eggs, but has tested my chicken eggs on several occasions with excellent results. I hope this information may help reassure Linda.

DI Unsworth, via email

Good Buddy

The Buddy egg monitor was initially tested using chicken eggs, so is more than capable of handling them.

The very maximum size of egg that the

I saw it!



Alan Holtham has more than just enthusiasm for chickens in common with Giles Osborne.

I was fascinated to see in the feature in about Giles Osborne in the October issue (*Space invaders*, PP129), that he has a Record BS300 bandsaw on the left-hand side just inside his workshop/brooder room.

Well, it's *deja vu*; I have exactly the same set-up in my garden shed workshop, though my wife says that I'm the only person sad enough to notice such a thing!

I just hope he got the set-up DVD to go with the saw, that was presented by... ahem... a well-known professional woodworker!

Alan Holtham, via email

monitor can handle is 75cm (length). However, I have heard of people putting larger eggs in the machine, and using a dark cloth to cover them (since you can't close the lid and light distorts the reading), but I wouldn't bank on it!
Mary Reeves, Avitronics, Truro

Useful stuff!

I enjoyed reading the very accurate article on diatomaceous earth (*Microscopic marvel?*, PP129).

I suspect that most people actually eat it in a minute proportion, as it has been used in grain stores/mountains for many years to prevent an attack of weevil and mite, so would be included in their daily bread.

It was originally used for preventing the growth of ant populations, and I still use it for

this. In fact, I use it as a general insecticide in my garden; roses and all.

The two interesting facts not included in the article are that it is also ideal when used to eradicate tiny household pests, including bed bugs.

It can be sprinkled on to carpets and then is easy to Hoover up after two or three days. This will also prevent any build-up of ticks etc brought in by one's own cats or dogs.

Because head lice among children have become even more common these days, there are all manner of nasty-smelling treatments now sold to deal with them. However, Diatom is by far the best way to rid youngsters of this problem.

In fact, this wonderful substance has too many uses to detail here, and has been effectively in use for very many years.

David Bland, SPR Centre, Chichester