

4-H Broilers, Fryers, Roasters, and Capons



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4-H Broilers, Fryers, Roasters, and Capons

By John P. Miller

Extension Specialist in Poultry

It's fun to raise chickens. You can have fun and earn money, too, by brooding and raising chicks for meat. You can buy baby cockerels of several breeds at a reasonable cost. Get them from local hatcheries.

Fryers sold at 3 to 3½ pounds in weight usually return the most profit. There are, however, exceptions to this rule.

Broilers or fryers are young chickens (usually under 16 weeks of age) of either sex, that are tender meated with soft, pliable, smooth-textured skin and flexible breastbone cartilage.

Roasters are young chickens of either sex, 20 to 36 weeks of age, weighing over 3½ pounds each.

Capons are cockerels from any breed with the male organs (testicles) removed at 8 to 12 weeks of age or when the bird weighs about 2 pounds. The birds are usually from 7 to 10 months old before they reach maturity and weigh over 4 pounds each.

Getting prepared to brood one or more lots of chicks needn't take much time or money. Almost every farm and rural home has a place to brood twenty-five to one hundred chicks which can be fixed up without building a separate brooder house. Anyone who can use a hammer and a saw can make feeders, fountains, and other equipment. (See 4-H Circular No. 64, *Construction of Poultry Equipment*.) This homemade equipment can be just as good as any you can buy.

The number of chicks brooded and raised for broilers, fryers, roasters, or capons should be small enough for you to do a good job and yet large enough to offer a challenge.

How to Get Started

Are your parents interested? If so, talk the situation and problems over with the 4-H leader. Decide where you will buy the chicks, where you will brood them, and how you will sell them when they are raised.

1. Buy day-old chicks from a local hatcheryman whose stock has a good reputation in your community. You don't have to ship chicks in from long distances.

2. Buy chicks from rapid-growing, fast-feathering stock that has been pullorum-tested and has had all reactors removed.

3. New Hampshires, Rhode Island Reds, Barred and White Plymouth Rocks are good breeds for broiler-, fryer-, roaster-, or capon-raising. Sometimes you can get baby White Leghorn cockerels from a hatcheryman free. It is worth asking about.

Brooding

BROODING QUARTERS

1. Broilers and fryers are usually kept in the brooding house. Allow at least 1 square foot of floor space for each chick up to 8 weeks of age. Then let each chick have $1\frac{1}{4}$ square feet of floor space. A small sunporch made of wire netting or wooden slats helps, but don't depend on it when you figure for needed space.

2. Most broilers and fryers are raised successfully on the floor.

3. Clean the house and equipment at least 2 weeks before your chicks arrive. When you clean, scrape, wash with boiling-hot lye water, and disinfect with any coal-tar disinfectant. Poultry Pointers No. 10, *Grow Healthy Pullets*, tells how to clean brooding houses.

4. Dirt floors are not good, but, if that's all you have, take off the top 6 inches of soil. Replace it with fresh sand on which chickens have not run. Sand is better than dirt.

5. Be sure the quarters are good and dry before any litter is put on the floor. The building should be free from drafts, rat-proof, and the corners rounded to keep chicks from crowding.

6. Chickens need air, just as you do. Give them plenty, but keep out drafts.

BROODERS

1. If your brooder is to work right, you must take good care of it. Electric, coal, oil, and gas are the most common brooders.

2. You can buy small lamp brooders for 25 to 50 chicks which cost from \$2 to \$4.

3. You can make a good brooder for twenty-five to fifty chicks (see illustration, page 4), using a light bulb for heat at almost no cost. It is a box with a 60-watt light bulb hanging through the cover. It is shielded by a tin can, open at the bottom. This box is about 24 inches long, 20 inches wide, and 10 inches high, with a cloth curtain at one end. The sides and one end sit on the floor. The chicks go in and come out through the cloth curtain at the end. This brooder is used indoors and should sit right on the floor. Cover the floor with litter. There is no automatic adjustment of temperature, so you need to watch the actions of the chicks closely to see whether they are too hot or too cold. If they are too hot, you can lift the cloth curtain on the front. If they are too cold, move the brooder to a warmer place or put in a larger light bulb. Check the temperature with a thermometer once in a while.

4. Be sure to try out the brooder 2 days before the chicks arrive.

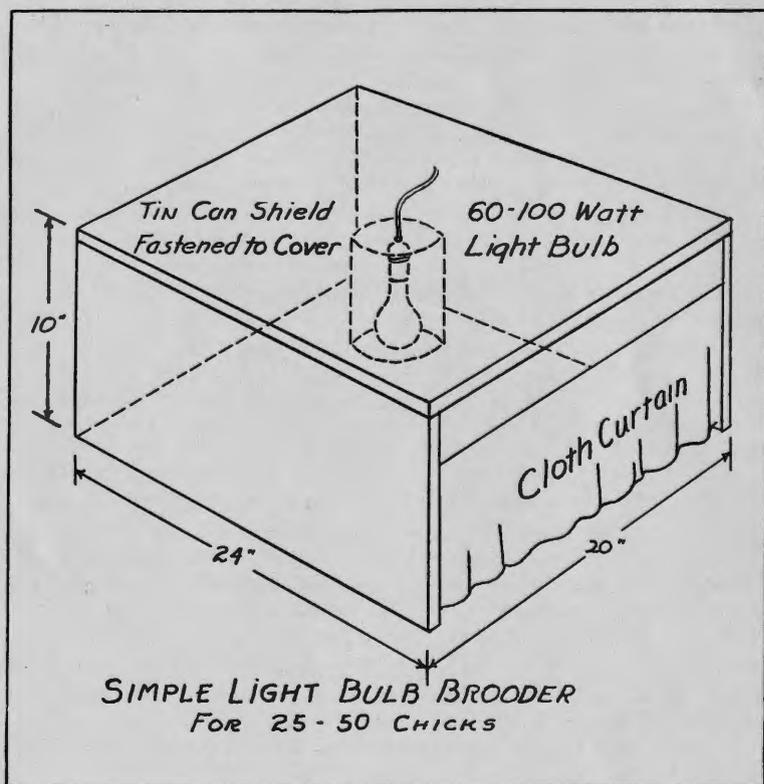
5. For complete information about brooders and brooding equipment, get a copy of Poultry Pointers No. 22, *Brooding and Brooding Equipment for Chicks*, from your County Extension Office. It also shows how to build mash hoppers from wood for different-aged chicks.

Care and Feeding of Chicks

1. Keep your chicks comfortable at all times by starting brooder temperature about 95° F. 2 inches from the floor, and lowering about 5 degrees each week. If you buy a brooder, follow the directions that come with it. Chicks hatched before June 1 may need heat until they are about 8 weeks of age.

2. Use dry, clean, mold-free litter, such as cut straw, wood shavings, peat moss, or sand. Stir the litter daily and change it often enough to keep it dry.

3. Place a hover guard made of boards or cardboard around the brooder about 2 feet from the hover. Keep it there for 2 or 3 days until the chicks learn where the heat is.





These 4-H members take good care of their birds.

4. Feed your chicks as soon as they are put under the hover. It is best to buy a good commercial broiler mash or chick starter mash to feed the chicks. For the first few days, sprinkle some mash on pieces of cardboard so the chicks will all learn to eat. Place the chick feeders so one end is slightly under the brooder.

5. Give them plenty of feeder and drinking space. One-half of the chicks should be able to eat at one time. Poultry Pointers No. 35, *Broiler and Fryer Production in Washington*, tells how much room to leave for each bird.

6. Do not crowd the chicks. Crowding is one of the worst things you can do to chicks. Each one needs 1 square foot of floor space.

7. Clean, sanitary conditions are important, because the chicks are kept in the brooding houses.

8. If chicks start picking, darken the room by putting something over the windows. It should let in as much cool, fresh air as possible without chilling them. Poultry Pointers No. 12, *Cannibalism in Chickens*, has other suggestions.

9. To learn more about feeding and taking care of your birds, get a copy of Poultry Pointers No. 35, *Broiler and Fryer Production in Washington*, or Poultry Pointers No. 19, *Home Grown Rations*, from your County Extension Office or leader. If you feed your chicks home-grown rations they may not grow as fast, but it does not cost as much.

10. Two important tables in Poultry Pointers No. 35 you should have are :

- a. Average weights of growing chicks from 4 to 14 weeks of White Leghorn, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island Red varieties.
- b. Average pounds of feed (mash and grain) eaten by growing chicks from 4 to 14 weeks of White Leghorn, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island Red varieties.

11. Coccidiosis is the most common disease. Watch for it. Droopiness and bloody droppings are the symptoms of affected chicks. Keeping the floor and litter dry and the chicks comfortable is the best way to prevent coccidiosis. If your birds look sick, ask your leader and County Extension Agent for advice immediately. Poultry Pointers No. 6, *Coccidiosis in Chickens and Turkeys*, is a good reference to have on hand.

Roasters

If you want to raise roasters, select fryers around 12 to 14 weeks old. The largest, heaviest birds are the best ones to continue growing out as roasters. Be sure the birds do not have breast blisters or crooked breasts. Keep on feeding them a good developing mash until they weigh 5 or 6 pounds and are still under 36 weeks of age. See that the males do not become staggy (too old) or show signs of beginning to lose weight.

Capons

In Washington, capons have not become very popular in the commercial industry. They are popular, however, for Sunday dinners with people who have facilities to raise them. Any of the heavy breeds make excellent capons. Brahmas, Jersey Giants, and White Rocks make the largest capons, but take a long time to grow. Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, New Hampshires, and Wyandottes are most commonly used for capons. When you decide to raise capons as a project, choose the breed you want. When the cockerels are from 8 to 12 weeks of age and range in weight from 1½ to 2½ pounds, you will learn how to caponize.

Caponizing takes quite a bit of practice and experience for you to be successful. After the operation the birds are kept until they are 8 to 11 months of age, when they reach maturity.

Capons cost more to raise than broilers, fryers, and turkeys because it takes more pounds of feed to produce each pound of meat. The price of capons at market time is usually not high enough to make the raising of capons as profitable as other meat birds. People in Washington at the present do not eat many capons.



A younger brother likes to feed his older brother's 4-H birds.

It's not hard to feed capons. Feed them the regular growing rations until they are from 8 to 10 months old. Then feed them a fattening mash mixed with milk during the last 2 weeks before marketing. Because capons take so long to grow, let them run on a good, clean range of green grass and legumes. This cuts the cost of raising them from 15 to 20 per cent.

Light, portable shelters can be used on the range until housing time in the fall. Since capons have a very quiet disposition, only 2 or 3 square feet of floor space are needed for each bird while you are fattening them. Live capons are fitted as other types of poultry when exhibited at poultry shows. In **dressing** capons, dress them the same way as any other **dressed** poultry.

Marketing the Broiler, Roaster, or Capon

1. To help the home meat supply, sell as many as possible to your parents at the market price.
2. The most common and easiest way to sell them is live weight. You can usually make more money this way, but sometimes dressed fryers are easier to sell.
3. Be sure that broilers or fryers sold live weight are well feathered and within the weights of chickens for which the highest price is being paid. Usually this is around 3 pounds.
4. USDA Farmers Bulletin No. 1377, *Marketing Poultry*, tells a lot about this subject. It tells how to kill and dress poultry.

5. Be sure that roasters and capons are in the best market condition when you sell them.

In your poultry project you should :

1. Keep a 4-H poultry record book and turn it in to your leader when he asks for it.

2. Do your own work, follow instructions, and attend club meetings.

3. Attend any community poultry judging school, fair, or judging contest.