

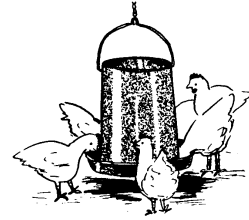


The University of Georgia

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BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .

CONTROLLING BROODINESS IN BACKYARD FLOCKS

Broodiness is a condition in which laying hens have a desire to set their eggs. When hens go broody they stop laying eggs and marshal their physiological and behavioral resources for incubating and hatching chicks. This is a favorable condition if one wants to produce chicks through the natural nesting process. It is, however, a detrimental condition if one is only interested in maximizing egg production. If one wants to achieve maximum egg production from their flocks, they must minimize the incidence of broodiness. Broodiness can reduce egg production by as much as 8 to 10 eggs per hen. Broodiness is controlled by several factors including genetics, endocrinology and the environment. Fortunately, the environment can be a significant contributor to broody behavior and, as a result, can also be manipulated to discourage this condition. The following are some methods that may be used to alter the hen's environment to discourage broody behavior:

Broody Pens or Coops

Broody females are placed in an isolated pen or coop similar to the laying pen except there are no nest present. Removing the hens from visual and physical stimulations provided by nest and nesting material will help discourage this behavior. In addition, it will help prevent producing hens from observing and adopting the broody behavior of their flock mates. The hens should be held in this isolation pen for 7 to 10 days before moving them back to the laying pen. Depending on the number of hens with broody behavior, multiple broody pens may be necessary. Rotating hens between pens with different feed and water locations and without nest will discourage nesting behavior. This procedure of pen rotation may have to be repeated several times to stop the broody condition.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

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Broody Pens Plus Light

Light intensity and duration are important factors in stimulating egg production. It has been well established by poultry scientists that low levels of continuous artificial light (i.e. 0.5 foot candles for 12 hours or more) will provide enough stimulation for maximizing egg production. Thus, the use of artificial light to stimulate egg production and break broody conditions in hens has been in use for many years. Using light stimulation in conjunction with a broody pen is more effective than simple pen rotation methods. With this procedure the coop or pen is equipped with a light(s) hung approximately 4 feet above the floor. Using 60 to 100 watt bulbs will provide the needed light intensity. Light should be provided for a minimum of 12 hours per day while the hens are in the broody pens. Using pens or coops with wire floors will also discourage broody behavior. Wire floors will not provide the hen the sensory materials (e.g. dirt, grass) to facilitate nesting behavior.

Summary Points

- The incidence of broodiness decreases egg production. On the average, egg production is reduced by 8 to 10 eggs each time a hen becomes broody.
- Inspect nests regularly and keep records on birds that you suspect of becoming broody.
- Remove broody birds as soon as possible and place them in a broody pen.
- Provide artificial light, if possible
- Maintain the birds in the broody pens for a minimum of 7 days before returning to the laying pens.
- Repeat this process as needed.

If a broodiness control program is conscientiously followed, egg production will be increased in your flock.



Dan L. Cunningham
Extension Poultry Scientist

Extension County Coordinator/Agent

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”