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CAPONS AND CAPONIZING

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The caponizing of young cockerels has been practiced in China and Europe for more than 1500 years, also Canada and Mexico are practicing this phase of poultry work in a limited way, but the art of caponizing young cockerels is fairly new in America, and especially is it new in Oklahoma. The general public, however, is beginning to appreciate the juicy, tender, sweet meat of the capon.

Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and Chicago are generally considered the best capon markets in the United States. San Francisco and other markets have been using a rather large number of capons the last few years. Oklahoma has developed a market for a limited number of capons, and many people are becoming interested in the production of capons for the holiday trade.

WHAT IS A CAPON?

A capon is an unsexed or castrated male chicken. When the cockerel is caponized his comb and wattles do not develop further. Female characteristics are noticed. The comb is small and pale in color. The hackle and saddle feathers usually develop the same as those of a male bird. Capons rarely ever crow, and show no disposition to fight. Sluggishness with a tendency to put on fat is noticed.

BEST KINDS OF BIRDS TO CAPONIZE

Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Rhode Island Reds, Rhode Island Whites, Jersey Black Giants, Orpingtons, Brahmas, Langshans, and Cochins, are all good for caponizing purposes. Occasionally Leghorns are caponized, but they are rather small, and too active to fatten well. The larger birds are quieter, more easily fattened, and carry a heavier layer of meat over the body.

TIME TO CAPONIZE

There seems to be no best time to caponize. When cockerels have reached the age of about three months and weigh from 1½ to 2 pounds it can well be done. If the birds are the right size, properly cared for, and correctly operated on the work can be successfully done at most any time. It is well, however, to take into consideration the value of finishing them for the holiday trade.

INSTRUMENTS NEEDED

A sharp knife, pair of spreaders, tissue tearing hook, and extractor are needed to perform the operation. There are several different kinds of instruments to use, some of which are more satisfactory than others. It does not pay to use cheap tools. Instruments should be washed and dried each time used.

HOW TO PERFORM THE OPERATION

1. Choose a sunny day if possible. Light is necessary in locating the organs.
2. Select healthy, vigorous cockerels, showing very little comb development.
3. Do not feed nor water the birds for 24 to 36 hours before operating. Birds not starved have rapid blood circulation, full intestines, and bleed easily, which makes the operation more dangerous and difficult to perform.
4. Keep birds in a cool, shady place during starving period.
5. Select an old barrel or box to use as table to work on.
6. Lay bird on its side on end of barrel or box with weights suspended from feet and wings. Weights hold bird firmly in correct position.
7. Wet the feathers along the side and over the ribs so that they will not be in the way. A few feathers can be plucked over last two ribs in front of the thigh if necessary.
8. Locate the last two ribs and pull the skin tight toward the thigh. Make an incision between last two ribs with sharp knife, while standing back of the bird with edge of the knife cutting from you.
9. With an incision cut 1 to 1½ inches long insert the spreaders between ribs and spread about ¾ inch. A thin, whitish membrane will appear. Tear the membrane away with the instruments and look for the organ.
10. A yellow organ about the size and shape of a pea or bean will appear attached close up to the back bone.
11. Slip the extractors over the yellow testicle and pull it out gently, being very careful not to tear the spermatic artery which runs just back of the testicle and to which the testicle is attached. If the spermatic artery does not turn loose easily from the testicle it may be clipped loose with a knife.
A well trained operator can remove both testicles from same side, but most beginners find it easier and safer to open both sides of the bird.
12. Keep the capons in a cool place away from other birds for a day or two. Give them a drink of clean water immediately and follow this with soft feed for a short time.

Occasionally birds will die during the operation or within a few minutes afterward. Such birds can be dressed immediately and used for food.

Well fed capons usually reach their growth at 8 to 10 months of age. When fed too long they fail to make gain.

SLIPS

Slips are neither capons nor cockerels. They are birds in which the testicles were not completely removed. They develop some comb, and are stoggy in appearance. They usually sell on the market as stags or old roosters.

PUFFS

Occasionally the capon will develop a puff or wind sack over the wound before the cut is healed.

If the wind puff appears clip a small three-cornered notch in skin. One cut is usually sufficient.

HOW TO MARKET

The sale of capons in small numbers has not proven to be as satisfactory as group sales. Capons pooled by farmers from several communities will command a greater price at less cost per bird for selling. The Thanksgiving and Christmas markets usually offer the highest prices for capon meat.