

Enlightened Chick

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The other day, I found myself in quite a fix, just because we live an energy efficient lifestyle. It all started out down in the Chicken House of Mystery (HP101). I had acquired two new hens—Colette, a real show bird, is a Blue Cochin; the other is a white Jersey Giant that I named Jersey Girl.

Well, Colette decided to go broody on me and started sitting on an assorted clutch of eggs. I have strong tendencies towards nurturing, so much that I have a hard time pulling up volunteer plants in the garden. So I could not deny her instincts to set. She had probably never been allowed to hatch eggs before.

Chick Peck & Pack

Colette had six eggs under her in the nest. I braved her pecking beak, and took each egg out to draw a pencil line around the circumference of each egg. Because hens turn the eggs that they set several times a day, a mark on just one side wouldn't work. This way I could quickly identify the original six eggs and remove any others that my other hens might deposit in the nest.

It takes 23 days for chicken eggs to hatch. As the time neared, I started checking Colette and her clutch a couple of times a day. One day, I lifted her up to check the eggs and counted only five. I put her back and checked the floor in front of the nest. There was a dead chick; I was completely bummed. I lifted her again to look at the eggs that were left, when a tiny, fuzzy chick climbed out from below half an eggshell.

Colette started pecking the chick, even while I was holding her in the air. "That's it for you, Missy," I thought. I snatched the chick out of harm's way and tucked it in my shirt. I took the four eggs that were left and came back to the house.

Hot Chick

I needed to get a chick house and incubator together, and fast. First, I would need an incandescent lightbulb for a heat source. I checked the lightbulb drawer. Hmm, none there—just compact fluorescent (CF) bulbs. I looked in the lamps. Nope, not a one. I checked the winery, the pantry, and the laundry room. Zip. I was getting desperate. As unforeseeable as it seemed, I desperately needed a watt-sucking, inefficient, heat-producing incandescent lightbulb. I was considering the hour's drive to town when I had a vague memory of a box of electronic test equipment in the basement. Bingo! I found a 60-watt bulb.



Chiclet cavorts at the author's desk.

I got a small cardboard box, cut a little doorway in its side, and placed it in a large metal cage. I hung the bulb inside the upside-down cardboard box. A jewelry box drawer, lined with velvet and chicken down, was placed on top of half an egg carton for height. I placed the sensor of an indoor/outdoor thermometer in the drawer/nest.

I put the four unhatched eggs and the chick in the drawer. She immediately fell asleep among the eggs. I covered the floor of the box and cage with paper towels. I found my old chick-watering jar and used half a mint tin for a feed dish. By hanging a cloth dinner napkin like a curtain over the opening of the box (with an inch-and-a-half gap at the bottom) the chick could go inside to be warm or outside to cool off. This was as close an approximation to the mother hen's protective underside as I could manage.

Chiclet

The eggs never hatched. I dutifully turned them several times a day. I kept the humidity up. The temperature was right. After three more days, I gave up. I was so hoping the orphaned chick would have at least one sibling.

I named the orphan Chiclet. I always refer to Chiclet as a she, hoping if I say it enough, it will be true. The egg she hatched from was sage green, laid by one of my Arucanas. She was a very good-looking chick.

I felt sorry for her spending so much time alone in her cage. I put a tiny, stuffed dog toy in her cage. After

One Lightbulb at a Time

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, a total switch to energy-efficient lighting in the United States would keep 202 million tons of carbon dioxide, 1.3 million tons of sulfur dioxide, and 600,000 tons of nitrogen oxides out of the atmosphere. Some experts suggest such a switch would reduce the U.S. yearly energy bill by at least US\$30 billion.

If all U.S. households replaced one incandescent bulb with one CF bulb, one nuclear power plant could be shut down. If U.S. homes replaced all of their 500 million incandescent bulbs with CF ones, the United States instantly would have untold energy wealth and surplus—no more shortages or brownouts.

CF bulbs have improved over the years, and they have become very affordable. The light is a warm color, not like old office fluorescents. If you don't use CFs yet, buy a package. As your incandescent bulbs burn out, replace them with CFs. Better yet, don't wait for your old bulbs to burn out, and replace them all now. The world will be a better place if you do.

Access

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searching, I found a small cloth lizard stuffed with sand. That went into the cage also.

It soon got to the point that when I opened her cage, she would run to me. Several times a day, I would hold her close in my hands and she would fall asleep. She took little chick naps. They would last anywhere from 15 seconds to a full minute. Then she would wake up and peep. I called it the peep-and-sleep mode.

When I gave her a red worm from my worm bed, she ran around the cage with it. Then she started on one end and gobbled it down like a string of spaghetti. Afterwards she stood there and kind of swayed on her little legs, like that was a pretty big dose of protein for such a little bird.

Hip Chick

Chiclet has outgrown her lightbulb and needs no heat at night now. She has the merest vestige of chick fluff left. She talks all the time and warbles like a songbird. During the day, I put her in a chicken tractor (bottomless cage) outside in the front yard. At night she comes back inside to her cage. She still runs to me.

She needs to grow bigger before she can be integrated into my flock. There is a dark underbelly to chicken society that people don't talk about, but consider the probable origins for phrases like "Bantam rooster complex," "hen-pecked," and "pecking order." Chiclet needs to be able to hold her own among the brutish biddies.

Watt-Ever, Chick

So, as it turns out in the end, there is a use for incandescent bulbs—as a heat source, which is what they do best. Just as Chiclet needed to be nurtured and given a chance, so do efficient technologies. Compact fluorescent lighting is the first step for many people.