

Backyard Poultry



Common Terms & Frequently Asked Questions

Definitions

Bantam – a miniature chicken, about one-fourth to one-half the size of a regular-sized chicken

Broiler – a young, tender meat chicken; also called a "fryer"

Brooder – a heated enclosure used to imitate the warmth and protection a mother hen gives her chicks

Cloaca – the chamber just inside the vent where the digestive, reproductive, and excretory tracts come together

Coccidiosis – a parasitic protozoal infestation, usually occurring in damp, unclean housing conditions

Cock – a male chicken; also called a "rooster"

Cockerel – a male chicken under 1 year old

Comb – the fleshy, usually red, crown on top of a chicken's head

Crop – a pouch at the base of a chicken's neck that bulges after the bird has eaten

Dusting – the act of thrashing around in the dirt to clean their feathers and discourage body parasites

Gizzard – an organ that contains grit for grinding up the grain and plant fiber a chicken eats

Grit – sand and small pebbles eaten by a chicken and used by its gizzard to grind up grain and plant fiber

Hen – a mature female chicken

Incubation period – the time it takes for an egg to hatch; normally about 21 days

Molt – the annual shedding and renewing of a bird's feathers

Nest – a secluded place where a hen feels she may safely leave her eggs; also, the act of brooding

Nest egg – a wooden or plastic egg placed in a nest to encourage hens to lay there

Oviduct – the tube inside a hen through which an egg travels when it is ready to be laid

Pasting – loose droppings sticking to vent area, also known as "pasting up" or "sticky bottoms"

Pullet – a female chicken under 1 year old

Ration – the combination of all feed consumed in a day

Roost – the place where chickens spend the night; the act of resting on a roost; also called "perch"

Rooster – a male chicken; also called a "cock"

Sex feather – a hackle, saddle, or tail feather that is rounded in a hen but usually pointed in a rooster (except in breeds that are hen feathered)

Spurs – the sharp pointed protrusions on a rooster's shanks

Stag – a cockerel on the brink of sexual maturity (comb and spurs begin to develop)

Started pullets - young female chickens that are nearly old enough to lay

Straight run – newly hatched chicks that have not been sexed; also called "unsexed" or "as hatched"

Unthrifty – unhealthy appearing and/or failing to grow at a normal rate

Vent – the outside opening of the cloaca, through which a chicken emits eggs and droppings from separate channels

Wattles – the two red or purplish flaps of flesh that dangle under a chicken's chin



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Frequently Asked Questions

How long do chickens live?

Answer: Chickens in small flocks live several years if conditions are correct. A life span of 6-8 years may not be unreasonable. Most commercial layers are kept for 2-3 years.

What is the best breed to raise?

Answer: There are countless breeds to choose from, depending upon intended size, utilization, & production levels.

Standard-sized breeds grow to large size at maturity, while **Bantam** breeds are “miniature” chickens. They grow to about one-fourth to one-half the size of a standard breed.

The types of breeds to select from fall into one of three categories:

- 1) **Egg Layers** – Genetically selected for high egg productivity. Usually have small bodies that make them undesirable as meat producers.
- 2) **Broilers** – Meat-Type Birds
- 3) **Dual-Purpose** – Can be used for both egg & meat production. Are heavier than & can withstand variation in temperatures better than standard Layer breeds.

Each type of bird is genetically developed to satisfy the best attributes for which they are intended. However, no single breed will provide the best characteristics for all three purposes.

How old are chickens when they begin to lay eggs?

Answer: Under optimum conditions; good nutrition, ideal day length, adequate housing and good management practices, most layers should begin egg production at about 20-22 weeks of age.

Can eggs be produced without a male being present?

Answer: Yes, most eggs produced for human consumption are produced this way & are non-fertile.



What types of feed should I offer to my chickens?

Answer: Poultry feeds are referred to as "complete" feeds, because they are designed to contain all the protein, energy, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients necessary for proper growth, egg production, and health of the birds. Feeding additional ingredients, mixed with the feed or fed separately, upsets the balance of nutrients in the "complete" feed. Therefore, feeding additional grains or supplements with the complete poultry feed is not recommended.

Commercial rations will usually produce the best results from all types of poultry. A ration designed specifically for a particular type of bird should always be used (ie. layer ration for layers, broiler ration for broilers, etc.). Commercial feed programs do vary. For best results, choose a company's feeding program and follow it.

Are there any nutritional differences between white shell and brown shell eggs?

Answer: No, there are no nutritional differences between white shell and brown shell eggs.

Why do hens stop laying eggs?

Answer: Hens that are healthy stop laying for either of two reasons:

- 1) They have been in production for a while and are entering a molt; or
- 2) They are not stimulated appropriately by light. Hens should be maintained on a long day or increasing day length schedule.