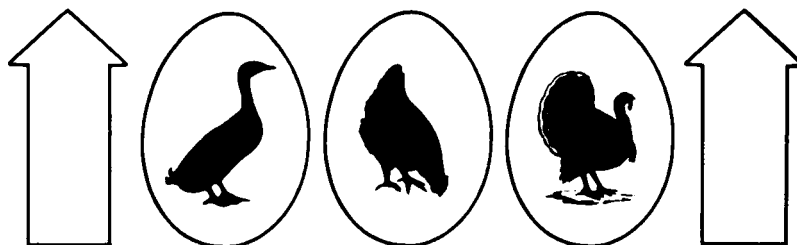


Poultry Facts



Selecting Breeds For Small Flocks

There are many breeds of chickens, all developed for various purposes. The reason a person wishes to have chickens will determine the breed and/or type of chicken to select. Chickens predominantly used for the production of meat and/or eggs comprise the majority of all chickens raised. However, some breeds are bred specifically for ornamental and/or show purposes.

The breeds used for production purposes can be classified into three basic types of chickens; dual-purpose, meat, and egg. The dual-purpose breeds found in the United States belong primarily to the American class. Representative breeds of the American class are Barred Plymouth Rocks, White Plymouth Rocks, New Hampshire, Rhode Island Red, and Wyandotte. These dual-purpose breeds were the predominant chicken until the 1940s, being used for both brown egg and meat production. After the mid-1940s, breeders began to develop the commercial meat-type chicken. Additionally, there was a greater use of the leghorn as an egg producer.

The purebred dual-purpose breeds that have survived to the 1980s are usually found in flocks belonging to breeders of exhibitor stock. Because of small flock size and more emphasis placed upon breed-type characteristics rather than production characteristics, the egg-producing ability is less than it could be. This is not to say that all dual-purpose chickens are poor egg producers, because there are some fine strains available. Some of the commercial breeders have fine dual-purpose chickens available. If you are interested in dual-purpose breeds for egg production, you should exercise care in selecting them.

Chickens used specifically for meat are no longer a purebred type, but a cross between two or more breeds. These chickens produce offspring which when under proper management can attain four pounds by seven to eight weeks of age. The male parent line is predominantly of the Cornish breed because of their massive breast muscling and conformation. The female parent is predominantly White Plymouth Rock or New Hampshire which gives to the female parent line good egg-producing qualities and moderate muscling qualities. The offspring from these two parent lines can be used as fryers, roasters, or capons. The meat-type chicken is not an efficient egg producer as it consumes a great deal of feed just for body maintenance. Additionally, with the inherent obesity of this meat-type chicken, the reproductive efficiency is sufficiently hindered to make them economically unfeasible for production of table eggs.

Chickens used solely for egg production can be of two general types. The two commercial types available produce either a brown shell or white shell egg. The White Leghorn is the principal white-shelled egg producer; it can produce 260 plus eggs in 12 months. Leghorns are lightweight birds that can convert feed to eggs very efficiently. Many different strains of White Leghorns are available from the various primary breeders and their franchise hatcheries.

The brown egg layers, for the most part, are derived from the breeds of the American class such as Plymouth Rock, New Hampshire, or Rhode Island Red. These new layers are somewhat lighter in weight than their standard bred counterparts of the American class, thus they require less feed for body maintenance. Their feed requirements are greater than those of the White Leghorn, making production costs for brown eggs a little higher than for white eggs. Most major primary breeders have both white egg and brown egg strains available.

The type of chicken a person selects for a flock should be chosen with careful consideration. Some additional points to consider are reputation of the hatchery and the services available from the hatchery. Nearby hatcheries are generally more responsive to questions and needs. Additionally, hatcheries that are good providers of service generally produce a better quality chick. Healthy day-old chicks should exhibit bright eyes, well-healed navels and round plump shanks. It is extremely important that the chicks receive vaccinations at the hatchery. The most *important vaccination is for Marek's Disease*. Cost of the vaccination should be only about five cents, which you will recover many times over through increased livability of your chickens.

There are numerous breeds of ducks, but only a few enjoy popularity. Ducks can be raised for meat or egg production. Popular meat breeds include the White Pekin, Rouen, and Muscovy. Pekins grow fast and are fair egg producers. The Rouens and Muscovy grow somewhat slower than Pekins but are used extensively in farm flocks. The Rouen has the same plumage color and pattern as the mallard but

the Rouen is much larger. Muscovy drakes are larger than the hens at market time and the breed possesses good foraging abilities. Khaki Campbell and Indian Runners are excellent egg producers but are very poor for meat.

Geese are raised for their meat qualities. Some of the breeds are Toulouse, Embden, African, Chinese, Canada, Buff, Pilgrim, Sebastopol and Egyptian. The most popular for farm flocks are Toulouse, Embden, African, Chinese and Pilgrim. The Embden is the fastest growing of the domestic breeds. The Embden, Toulouse and African will attain adult weights in excess of 19 pounds. The Egyptian has a mature weight of only four to five pounds.

There are a number of recognized breeds of turkeys available. However, for farm flocks the most popular are the Bronze turkey which has the wild-type plumage and a commercially available white turkey which has been selected for white feathering and fast growth. Both types are good for small flock production. The disadvantage of the Bronze would be dark colored pin feathers sometimes found after processing.