

What is Purebred Poultry?



When you think of purebred poultry, what comes to mind? The barnyard rooster that provides the morning wake-up call? The flock of production hens that provides eggs? The roast turkey on your dinner table? It is more than this. Besides providing the useful eggs and meat, we see creatures of beauty to be bred and admired. The large Light Brahma with elegance and class, the spritely Sebright with beauty and energy, the stately Toulouse goose, the magnificent Royal Palm turkey, the talkative Call duck, and much, much more. There are literally hundreds of breeds and varieties in chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys, each with their own unique beauty and qualities.

There is no "best breed" of poultry for everyone. Personal preference as to shape, color, size, temperament, etc., go into a decision as to what to choose. Different areas of the country, with their varieties of climates, will have some impact on a decision as to a choice of breed. Poultry is divided into large chickens (also called large fowl), Bantams, waterfowl and turkeys. In addition to full size, or large chickens, poultry fanciers have developed a miniature counterpart of each large chicken called a Bantam. Bantams are normally one-fourth to one-fifth as large as their full-size counterparts, and in addition there are breeds that exist only as Bantams.

There are also breeds of Bantam ducks. Bantams produce smaller eggs and have less meat, and are generally not kept for production, but are a prime consideration where space is limited.

A "breed" is identified as having a particular body shape or style. Breeds are further divided into varieties, usually by differences in color or pattern of feather markings. In addition special features determine differences in varieties, such as comb shape or extra feathers such as a "beard" or "top-knot."

Select the breed that appeals to your taste, whether chicken, waterfowl or turkey, taking into consideration locale, space available, climate and/or availability. The American Poultry Association

publishes a breed standard book, the APA Standard of Perfection. It is a book that describes all the breeds and colors recognized by the organization, and the standards or guide lines by which all poultry is judged. Please see ordering information on the Homepage.

When you decide on a particular breed, locating them is not difficult. Attend a poultry show and look the birds over, breeders will often have birds there to sell. There are many reputable breeders and hatcheries that provide birds in a variety of price ranges, from eggs to chicks to full-grown birds. Many breeders will welcome a visit to look over their birds and facilities and are more than willing to answer questions and provide you with birds, or give information as to where you can find the breed you are looking for. The most important thing to remember is to buy from a reputable breeder or NPIP (National Poultry Improvement Plan) member hatchery, and that the birds are free from obvious disease and representative of the breed. In general, if the owner takes good care of his or her stock and is proud of them, you will have made a good purchase.

For some people owning and reproducing some of these elegant creatures is enough reward, but for others the show hall is the focal point--the true measure of the hobby's rewards. The competition of the show, whether it is a youngster in 4-H or an "oldster" in retirement, is a gratifying experience. In addition to the competition, it is a chance to meet and talk with people who share a like interest. The best way to learn about showing poultry is to actually attend a show--look at all the birds and talk to exhibitor.

To prepare a bird for show, the bird needs to be healthy, free of broken feathers, clean and presentable. Information on "fitting for show" can be found in many of the books and pamphlets available from the A-P-A, or simply by asking someone who shows. Add up the benefits of family sharing, friendships and the challenge of breeding that perfect bird and I think you will agree it all adds up to a very enjoyable hobby. Give it a try!

Caring for your Purebred Poultry is really quite easy. Your birds will require adequate nutritional feed, fresh clean water and a dry, clean place to live. Housing can be as simple or as elaborate as you like. Some consideration will have to be given to the type of housing as you are deciding on a breed. Large fowl and waterfowl will require more room than the Bantam chicken or duck. A good rule to follow is one square foot of floor space per bantam, or three square feet of floor space per large fowl. Ducks and geese require somewhat more. Your housing should provide for easy cleaning and adequate ventilation (windows or openings), be draft-free, offer protection from the elements and from wild animals.

If the birds cannot be let out for exercise and sunshine, then provide them with a screened-in area for this purpose. If you have access to the outside, it should be well-fenced, dry, have shade available and grassy areas if possible. For the housing litter can be hay, straw, pine shavings, or any other absorbent material that is available. It should be kept clean and dry.

Fresh feed and clean water are also keys to healthy poultry. Do not let your feed become exposed to the weather, and protect it from rain and vermin. Change water daily and wash out water pans regularly. Commercial balanced feeds are available from local feed stores and come in pelleted, crumbled or mash forms. These feeds contain needed vitamins and minerals and are available for all types and ages of poultry. Grains can also be fed along with a commercial balanced ration. In addition, provide grit (there are no "hens teeth") necessary for digestion of foods and oyster shell for laying birds. Let the birds out on the lawn if you can. They will scratch around, eat some grass and maybe a bug or two. This is healthy for the birds and provide you with the added enjoyment and peacefulness of just watching them going about the business of life.