

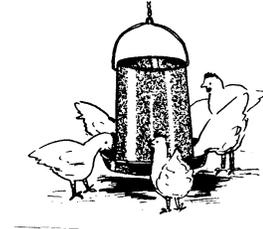


*The University of Georgia*

**Cooperative Extension Service**

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## ***BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .***

### **MANAGING DUCKS FOR EGG PRODUCTION**

Many people enjoy keeping a small flock of ducks on their farm or around their homes when space is available. Ducks are beautiful animals and can be entertaining as well as having practical value as weed eaters and egg producers. In addition, ducks can be maintained with minimal equipment and expenses. In many cases, ducks are kept for their ability to be good egg producers. The following tips will help to improve egg production of one's flock.

- **Sexual Maturity.** It is not desirable to bring ducks into egg production before 7 months of age because of problems with small egg size and low hatchability. Ducks hatched in April through July will reach sexual maturity at about 7 months of age because they are maturing during a decreasing day length. On the other hand, ducks hatched in September through January will mature 1 to 2 months early because they will be subjected to increasing lengths of natural day light. Scheduling your hatch season to coincide with the April through July time period will eliminate this problem.
- **The Production Cycle.** Egg production will increase rapidly once sexual maturity is reached. Ducks can be brought into full production by giving them 14 hours of light daily once they reach sexual maturity. Artificial light can be added to the day by using a 40 to 60 watt light bulb in the holding pens or coop. The flock should be laying 90% or more within 5 to 6 weeks. Daily egg production should remain above 50 percent for about 5 months in meat type breeds. High producing egg type breeds will have a greater rate of persistency. Maximum efficiency for egg production can be achieved by feeding a commercial breeder diet. Increased nutrient requirements to support high rates of egg production make it essential to feed a special diet that is well balanced in the nutrients necessary to maintain reproductive performance.

#### **PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK**

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- **Fertility and Hatchability.** Maintaining the proper number of males and females in the breeding flock is important to achieving high levels of fertility and hatchability. For best results, one male for each six females is recommended. A few extra males may be kept to replace mortality as it occurs. Levels of fertility and hatchability parallel egg production (i.e. fertility and hatchability increase as egg production increases). Fertility should increase rapidly during the first few settings of eggs, but will taper off toward the end of the egg production cycle. It is debatable as to the value of keeping breeding stock once the level of egg production drops below 50%. Some find it more economical to molt the birds for 8 to 10 weeks to provide them a rest period for an additional lay period once they drop below 50% egg production.
- **Handling the Eggs.** Most duck eggs are laid before 7 a.m., thus one might want to confine breeders to the laying house at night. It is advisable to gather the eggs early in the morning if artificial incubation is going to be used. Removing the eggs as soon as possible lessens the problems of dirty and cracked eggs. Clean and dry breeder houses are important for the production of clean, intact hatching eggs. Soiled eggs can be washed with care after collection using water warmer than the eggs. Temperatures of 110 - 115 degrees F. are adequate for washing the eggs. Cracked, misshapen or abnormally small eggs should not be incubated. Hatching eggs can be stored at a temperature of 55 degrees F. for up to two weeks without losing hatchability. Eggs should be stored small end down. For natural incubation, it is important to provide clean, dry nesting facilities. Ducks will make their own nest if straw or other litter material is provided. Wood shavings, peanut hulls and peat moss also make good litter materials. Nest boxes can also be provided. Nests should be 12 inches wide, 18 inches long and 12 inches deep and can be placed in a row along the walls of the breeder house. Feed and water should be in close proximity so the female can obtain her daily nutrient requirements without having to leave the nest for long periods.

Raising ducks can be an enjoyable and profitable experience. Providing a protective breeding environment and attention to egg production and handling can increase one's success with raising ducks.



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“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”