



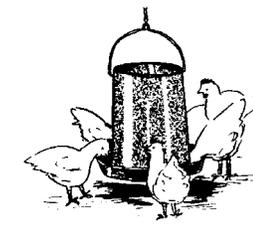
The University of Georgia

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BACKYARD FLOCK . . .



THE RIGHT FEED FOR THE RIGHT BIRDS

Few people who enjoy rearing poultry as a hobby or small business are in a position to mix their own feed. It is usually far more economical to buy feed from a dealer than purchase small amounts of the individual components, grind the grain, mix the ingredients, etc. Thus, it is worthwhile to consider what types of feed are recommended for each class of poultry. In general, the label on feeds purchased from dealers indicates how it is best used. However, there is frequently a degree of overlap in labeling, and some clarification might prove useful to those with backyard flocks.

BROILERS: Broiler chickens grow extremely rapidly, and are able to quadruple their birth weight in the first week of life. To achieve this, a high protein broiler starter diet is needed. This feed will also have high levels of calcium and phosphorus for proper bone growth, as well as a complement of vitamins and trace minerals. For older broilers, from 3 weeks of age until slaughter, a broiler finisher diet is ideal. This feed will have somewhat less protein and a higher level of calories, or energy. Calcium and phosphorus levels will be lower than in the starter.

It should be emphasized, however, that it is not absolutely necessary to use two (or even more) separate feeds for successfully growing broilers. While use of a starter and then a finisher feed most suits the birds' actual nutritional needs at its different stages of life, if one has only a small number of birds it may be far easier to purchase only one feed. Thus, a broiler starter feed, or a general broiler feed, is satisfactory for the small flock since for backyard conditions modest differences in performance are usually not of great importance.

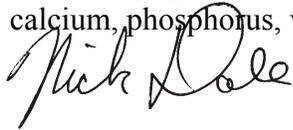
LAYING HENS: Many people with backyard flocks rely on the chickens as a source of eggs for the family. An obvious difference between the nutritional needs of the broiler and the layer is the need for a large amount of calcium to form strong eggshells. A laying hen feed with at least 3% calcium is a necessity. However, one should never use laying feed for raising young immature

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females. If egg production is to begin at about 20 wk of age, a laying feed with high levels of calcium should begin to be fed at about 18 wk. If a high calcium feed is fed to young, growing birds, severe bone problems are an absolute certainty and mortality from kidney stones is possible. Thus, while rearing birds, one should purchase a pullet feed. As laying pullets grow more slowly than broilers, they have a lower requirement for protein. However, if only a small number of pullets are being reared for egg production and broiler feed is already available on the premises, there is little harm in using broiler feed for pullets.

SCRATCH FEEDS: The backyard poultry producer should be aware that scratch grains, or scratch feeds, should never be used as the only feed for poultry. The term “scratch grains” is more correct than “scratch feed” because these products usually consist only of a mixture of grains which have been coarsely ground. In no way should these be considered to be balanced diets, nor are they intended to be. While scratch grains can be provided to the backyard flock as a supplement to regular feed, they should not be used if a high level of production is expected from the flock. Grains are much higher in calories and lower in protein than regular feeds, and are extremely low in calcium, phosphorus, vitamins, and minerals.



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