

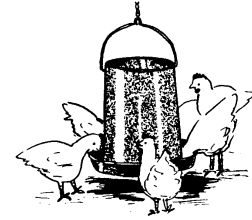


The University of Georgia

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BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .

WHICH BREED OF CHICKEN SHOULD I PUT IN MY BACKYARD FLOCK?

Poultry production has evolved from raising a few hens and a rooster in your backyard to one of the largest food industries in the country where poultry farmers contract with companies to grow chickens. Even so, many people continue to raise chickens in their backyards and the practice is catching on. They decide to begin a backyard flock for a variety of reasons. Some do it for the pleasure of having them, others for the convenience of having eggs or meat on hand at all times. Some people raise chickens in their yards for nutritional reasons and also the reduced cost associated with having their own flock. A large number of backyard growers raise chickens for showing at competitions such as state and county fairs. Whatever the reasons for wanting to start a flock the decision must be made on the breed and type of birds to use.

There are a vast number of different breeds of chickens available. Some are rare and seldom seen while others are common and easily accessible. Within each breed there may be different varieties. In this month's backyard poultry tip, ten of the most common breeds raised by backyard growers will be discussed and the more common varieties within each breed highlighted.

Ameraucana- The "Easter Eggers" are the most common variety within this breed. They are layers that produce various shades of blue and blue-green eggs. They can be obtained from most hatcheries. However, they are usually mixed bred and may lay blue, green or other colored eggs and do not conform to standard. The birds are cold hardy and will mature moderately early. They are mostly calm and non-aggressive and can be caged or allowed to roam free.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

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Australorp or Black Australorp- These are fairly common and can be used for eggs or meat. They lay medium sized brown shelled eggs. They will mature early and are usually good mothers, quiet, docile and easily handled. They can be raised in cold temperatures and can be caged or allowed to free range.

Belgian D'Uccle or Barbu D'Uccle- This is one of the most popular bantams and weighs about 1.3 lb/0.55 kg. This bantam is bearded and feather footed and lays tiny creamy white eggs. They are great brooders but due to their fancy feathering are not suited for inclement weather. They are very slow to mature, are friendly and quiet. The cocks are less aggressive than other banties. They will tolerate confinement but they are fliers.

Leghorns- These birds are the most common layer breed and are the ultimate egg producing machines. They can be in a variety of colors, the most common being the white leghorns. They mature very early and lay pearl white medium to large eggs but are non-setters. They are heat tolerant but may get frost bite on their combs. They are economical eaters and will adapt to confinement or free range. They are noisy and nervous and usually avoid human contact.

New Hampshire or New Hampshire Red- This bird is fairly common and can be used for meat or eggs. It matures early and lays large light to medium brown eggs. The hens make good mothers and can be reared in either hot or cold weather, though they tend to get frost bite on their combs. They are calm but can be friendly or aggressive and will adapt to confinement or can be reared free range.

Orpington- They are often referred to as “the big friendly bird”. Only the buffs are popular today. They were formerly used for meat purposes but are now considered a dual purpose breed (meat and egg). They will mature moderately early and lay large to medium sized brown eggs. The hens are excellent mothers and can tolerate cold temperatures. They are docile, affectionate and easily handled, making them easily bullied. They adapt readily to confinement but can also be raised free range.

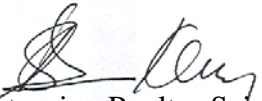
Plymouth Rock- This is a very popular bird and was once considered to be America's favorite bird. It is today still commonly found in backyard flocks. It is a large breed which can be used for both meat and eggs. The hens mature fairly early and lay light pinkish to medium brown eggs. They are good mothers but do not brood frequently. These birds will tolerate cold climatic conditions and adapt well to confinement or can be free ranged. They are friendly and are easily handled.

Polish or Poland- These birds are most popularly used as show birds but were formally known for good egg production. These birds lay mainly small white eggs but are non-setters and because of their fancy feathering are not suited for foul weather. Their plumage tends to block their vision making them poor foragers but they will adapt to confinement. They are friendly and quiet and are easily bullied.

Rhode Island Red and Rhode Island White- These are popular dual purpose breeds and are considered the best breeds for producing brown eggs. They mature early and lay large rich medium brown eggs. They are good mothers but they brood infrequently. They tolerate hot or cold weather and can be reared in confinement or free range. They are calm birds but the cocks can be aggressive.

Silkie- This is the most popular of the bantam breed reared in backyards. They can be bearded or beardless and can be a variety of colors. They are slow to mature and lay small eggs with a light tint. They are one of the most broody of the banties and will survive hot or cold weather, but because of their fancy feathering they are not suited for foul weather. They adapt well to confinement and are docile and friendly.

Some backyard poultry growers will select more than one breed of chicken for their flock depending on what purpose they will be used for. Whichever breed you select, it is important to be aware of the behavior and temperament of each breed.


Extension Poultry Scientist

Extension Poultry Coordinator/Agent

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