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# Contents December 2025/January 2026

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- 04 Editor's Letter**
- 06 Photo Essay:**  
***Classroom Hatching at State Road Elementary***
- 10 Flocks to Follow**
- 12 Flock Photos:**  
*The best of the best submissions via snail mail and our social sites.*

- 14 Poultry News**
- 16 Something to Crow About**
- 17 Ask the Experts**
- 62 Coming Events**
- 64 Recommended Products**
- 67 Marketplace**
- 68 Breeders Directory & Classifieds**
- 70 Just for Fun**

## RECIPE

- 18 Make-Ahead Pies for the Holidays**  
*By Rita Heikenfeld*

## ARTICLES

- 22 In-Ovo Sexing**  
*By Mark Hall*
- 26 Tips for Keeping Chicks Warm Off-Grid**  
*By Wren Everett*
- 28 Winter Teas for Chickens**  
*By Erin Snyder*
- 32 Why Do Chickens Eat Things They Shouldn't?**  
*By Anna Twitto*
- 34 British Hen Welfare Trust: Rescuing Hens for 20 Years**  
*By Susie Kearley*
- 38 Chickens at a Welsh Museum**  
*By Susie Kearley*
- 42 Celebrating with the Birds**  
*By Sherri Talbot*
- 44 Breed Profile: The Redcap Chicken**  
*By Kenny Coogan*
- 48 Arthritis in Ducks**  
*By Erin Snyder*
- 52 A World History of Geese**  
*By Kenny Coogan*
- 58 Duck Tales**  
Ducks Are Cuter Than Chickens, In My Eyes *By Candi Johns*
- A Surprise Duck Hatching  
*By Fiona Wagner*



18



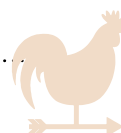
34



48

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# From the Editor

**W**ELCOME TO OUR December/January issue! The holiday season is here, and we're ready to ring in a new year. Personally, I'm eager to leave this past year behind and am hopeful for a brighter 2026. As we look ahead to new beginnings, it's a great time to focus on caring for our flocks that depend on us, especially during the challenges of winter.

Keeping newly hatched chicks warm in the cold winter months may be challenging, especially if you live off-grid. Wren Everett shares her tried-and-true methods for keeping chicks warm without the use of electricity. Some of the methods she's had success with are using a broody hen, waiting until later in the winter to start incubating after the bulk of the cold has passed, making a mobile brooder box that's easily moved to the warmest parts of the home, and keeping chicks in small groups (4 to 6) so they can huddle together safely without the fear of any getting suffocated by the others. You'll learn more about keeping your little feathered friends warm on Page 26.

In addition to keeping them warm, ensuring your flock stays mentally engaged is just as important. If chickens don't have enough to do or enough space, they may peck at non-food items such as plastic foam, shoelaces, or buttons. They peck at anything unfamiliar in their environment to see if it's edible, but doing so may be harmful to them, as some items may cause an impacted crop or block their digestive system. To learn more about chickens eating non-food items, you'll want to read Anna Twitto's article on Page 32.

Switching gears to something more festive, Sherri Talbot gets in the holiday spirit with her article "Celebrating with the Birds," which describes festive and traditional poultry celebrations from around the world. For instance, while sausage is a common dish throughout Italy during the New Year celebration, some regions enjoy serving guinea fowl in various ways. In the U.K., goose was the main attraction for many years, because the meat was believed to be superior to that of other birds, and it wasn't until turkey became widely available that it began to overtake goose as the Christmas dinner of choice. You can read more about celebrations around the world on Page 42.

And, of course, since poultry aren't raised just for their meat, I wanted to include an article that uses up some of their eggs while satisfying your sweet tooth and providing some ideas for holiday get-togethers. Rita Heikenfeld shares some of her favorite pie recipes in her article, "Make-Ahead Pies for the Holidays." You can create these delicious desserts before the hustle and bustle of the season arrives. Your company will thank you!

All of us at *Backyard Poultry* wish you a happy and healthy holiday season. Enjoy!



**Ann Tom,**  
Editor

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FLOCK COMMUNITY

# CLASSROOM HATCHING AT *State Road Elementary*

BY RACHEL WOODS







EVERY YEAR, I TEACH THE same science unit to first graders: Plants and Animals. For plants, students grow their own miniature lawn with ryegrass and alfalfa seeds, eventually even mowing it using scissors. For animals, we focus specifically on the life cycle. In the past, we taught this standard with larva, pupa, and adult isopods (pillbugs and sowbugs). This was part of the written curriculum and was covered by the science budget. It was informative and did the job, but lacked the excitement that science typically evokes.

Earlier this year, when planning for the upcoming science units, my coworker mentioned there were perfectly good incubators just sitting in storage from when kindergarten used to incubate eggs 15 to 20 years ago. After a quick approval from my principal, I went to the head of elementary science, who also happens to be the 4th grade teacher in my building. She was quick to approve this adventure but warned there was no science money to fund it since hatching chicks wasn't written in the curriculum. I ran to our school PTO president for help, and at the next board meeting, they approved \$100 of expenses to cover materials such as food, electrolytes, and bedding. The last hurdle was a brooder box. My dad stepped in at this point and built a brooder box base from an old horse trough he had lying around, and we were officially ready for ducklings and chicks! It truly took a village to make this all happen.

There are three 1st grade classes this year, which means I get to teach Plants and Animals three separate times before the year is over. The first round of incubation was 14 duck eggs. Six successfully hatched and they stayed in the classroom for about nine days before going to Deep

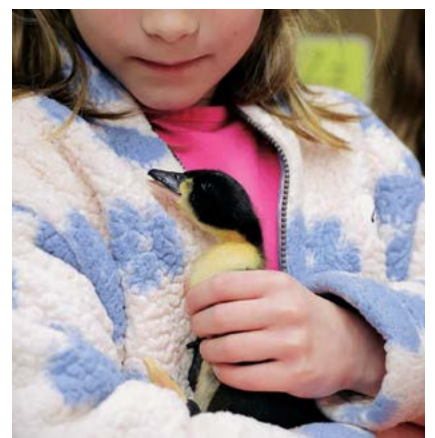
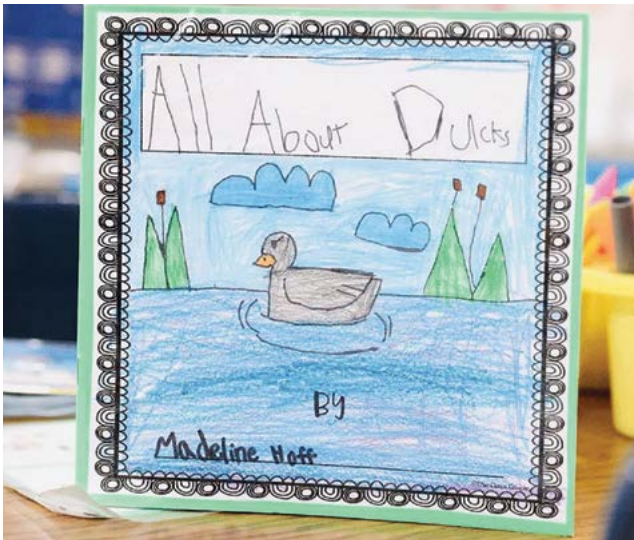
Roots Community Farm with *Backyard Poultry's* very own poultry expert, Ana Skemp.

Every morning, the ducklings were part of the morning meeting, every afternoon they were taken out during read-to-self and were read to, and during science, the children cared for the ducklings and then wrote about the experience. On the last day, students walked them out with my dad before he drove them to the farm. There wasn't a dry eye in the bunch. Their names were Ms. Mack, Lucky, Googy, James Pond, Caya, and Aflac.

Next, we incubated 12 chick eggs and 11 of them hatched for the second science class! A huge success. Students observed, studied, handled, cared for, and wrote about the life cycle of chicks. Again, they were out daily. Even our 5th grade students came down to help take care of the chicks each morning. The whole school eventually got involved, either helping care for or visiting the cute little babies. Our librarian had a brilliant idea and brought in her animal stroller that she uses for her bunny so we could wheel the chicks from class to class for the whole school to enjoy. These chicks will go to a farm in La Crescent, Minnesota. Students named them Fluffy, Dragon, Racecar, Flames, Pikachu, Lily, Niko, Sleepy, Fluff-Ball, Peck, and Pom-Pom.

For our third and final science class, we have another 12 chick eggs currently sitting in the incubator. They'll hopefully hatch in three weeks, and the magic will start all over again. I can't wait to see what their names will be. It's been such a rewarding and magical experience for all. Even my two children got to enjoy the ducklings and chicks over the weekends when we'd come in to take care of them. I recently applied for a grant to keep this hands-on science experience a reality for years to come. ●







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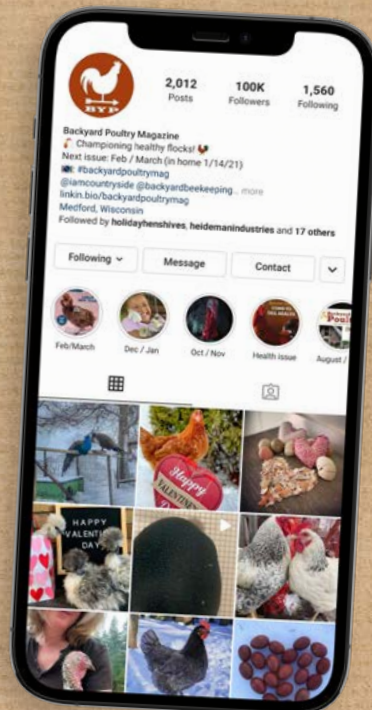
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— Kim Linman



Lucy and her chickens! — Sharon Lewis



— Milligan Farms

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— Doug Minor



Just a couple of 'turkeys' eating lunch on the barn porch.  
Granddaughter and Margaret. — Carmen C. Horton



— Kim Linman



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# POULTRY NEWS

BY KENNY COOGAN

In “Poultry News” we share poultry stories of the current, odd, fun, and important. If there are stories that you’d like us to cover, or want to share with us, please email [editor@backyardpoultrymag.com](mailto:editor@backyardpoultrymag.com).

## Hands-On Health: Why Daily Chicken Checks Matter

“Getting started with chickens is exciting, but it can also feel a little overwhelming at first,” says Casse Weaver, founder of Humboldt Hen Helper. “Chickens have unique health needs, and the best thing you can do is really get hands-on with your flock.” Regular handling builds trust and makes health checks easier. A quick daily check should include feeling the crop and the abdomen, assessing the keel (breastbone area) for body weight, and inspecting the vent. Once a month, a full exam helps catch small issues before they become serious — checking for mites or lice, examining feet, and assessing overall condition.

Weaver emphasizes that “the more you interact with your birds, the more you’ll notice subtle changes in behavior or health. That’s where prevention really starts.” She encourages new poultry keepers to treat health checks like brushing your teeth — routine, quick, and essential.

Weaver’s nonprofit began as a response to a growing need in her community for accessible poultry help. “People were reaching out with everything from basic questions to serious injuries, and there wasn’t a local resource,” she explains. Now, Humboldt Hen Helper assists 3 to 5 people in-person weekly and many more online through phone, text, email, and social media.

On the day of writing, Weaver is making two home visits: one to assess

an elderly hen in decline, and another to help a bird recovering from a dog attack. “Sometimes it’s emotional support as much as medical,” she says. “People love their chickens, and they want to do right by them.”

Last week’s “well coop” checks included housing evaluations, feed recommendations, and supplement discussions. One recurring issue? Too many treats. “Chicken obesity is real,” Weaver notes. “People think they’re being kind, but too many treats can lead to serious health problems. We talk a lot about getting hens back to a healthy weight.”

She also stresses the importance of community education: “I want people to feel empowered, not embarrassed. Asking for help is part of good animal stewardship.”



Casse Weaver and chickens.



The perfect starter kit for at-home emergencies.



## Poultry Production: A Pillar of National Strength

Blake Rollins, executive vice president of The Poultry Federation, has been vocal about the industry's role in national resilience. "The bottom line in food security is national security," Rollins tells *Backyard Poultry* magazine. "Americans must be able to feed ourselves and our allies, and the poultry industry is central to that mission."

Rollins points to northwest Arkansas as a prime example, where over a billion chickens are raised annually. The region's poultry sector supports more than 2 million American jobs and contributes over \$660 billion to the economy. "Poultry is the most consumed livestock commodity in America," Rollins explains. "You can't work in agricultural policy without engaging in poultry issues."

He also highlights the industry's ripple effect: "Poultry brings agriculture together — driving demand for corn and soybeans, supporting family farms, and creating opportunity for plant workers, equipment manufacturers, and countless others." With more than 6,500 family farms in Arkansas alone, Rollins sees poultry as a unifying force. "Too often, agriculture is divided into silos," he says. "But poultry connects the dots. It's more than a food source — it's a vital pillar of America's strength and security."

Rollins, a native Arkansan with deep ties to the region, adds, "I'm honored to help lead the Federation. We have a lot of avenues for people to make a difference and be engaged, whether through advocacy, education, or community events."

## Understanding Calcium in Chickens: A New Study

Researchers wanted to figure out how well chickens absorb calcium from their food, especially when phytic acid is present. Phytic acid is found in grains and seeds and can block calcium from being absorbed properly.

To test this, scientists used two methods:

- **Bone ash:** They looked at how strong and mineral-rich the chickens' bones were.

- **Digestibility:** They measured how much calcium was absorbed in the chickens' intestines.

They found that when phytic acid was added to the feed, calcium absorption dropped by about 20%. That means chickens weren't getting as much calcium as they needed, even though it was in their food.

Both testing methods gave similar results, so farmers and researchers can use either one to check how effective a calcium source is.

If you raise chickens — even just a few in your backyard — this study has some useful lessons:

- **Watch your feed ingredients:** Many commercial feeds include grains that contain phytic acid. If your chickens aren't getting

enough calcium, it could lead to weak bones, poor eggshells, or leg problems.

- **Use supplements wisely:** Adding calcium sources like crushed oyster shells or limestone can help, but they need to be available in a form your chickens can absorb. Just adding calcium into the feed isn't enough if other ingredients block it.

- **Consider phytase enzymes:** Some feeds include enzymes that break down phytic acid, making calcium easier to absorb. If you're buying feed, check the label or ask the supplier.

- **Observe your flock:** If you notice thin eggshells, limping, or slow growth in young birds, it might be a sign they're not getting enough usable calcium.

It's not just about how much calcium is in the feed — it's about how much your chickens can actually use. That's the key to keeping your flock strong and productive.●

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**KENNY COOGAN** earned a master's degree in Global Sustainability and co-hosts the Mother Earth News and Friends podcast, which can be enjoyed at [MotherEarthNews.com/Podcast](http://MotherEarthNews.com/Podcast). He also hosts and created the television show *Florida's Flora and Fauna with Conservationist Kenny Coogan*. To learn more about that program, visit [www.FloridasFloraAndFauna.com](http://www.FloridasFloraAndFauna.com).



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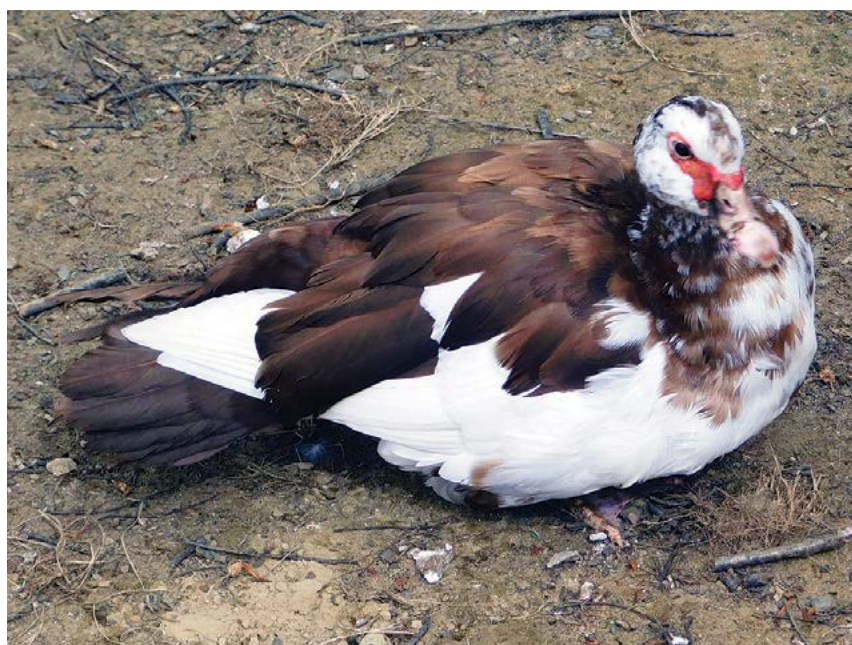
## Muscovy Duck

I enjoy your magazine and the stories and information of all the poultry. Thank you!

I read the recent article on heavy duck breeds and that the Muscovy duck (S. A. waterfowl), which states that the lifespan is from 7 to 10 years. My duck, Moussa, is at least 16 years old, if not more.

She was fully grown when I brought her home, so I figured her age to be at least the 16 years.

She doesn't walk too well, but she's still 'going' and enjoys her life with the other two ducks and the hens that I have. Here's a photo of her taken this summer.



— Sheryl Smith, Vermont

## A Correction and an Apology

A very serious error was recently brought to my attention, by two Canadian readers, regarding the article I wrote about Ridley Bronze Turkeys, published in the April/May 2025, issue of this magazine. When I went back to check on it, I was horrified. It's perhaps one of the most egregious errors I've ever made in my writing career.

In the article, I referred to retired professor and world-renowned research scientist, Dr. Roy Crawford,

as Art Crawford. Not only do I consider this a serious and unacceptable mistake under any circumstances, but I felt doubly bad, as Dr. Roy Crawford had been so amazingly personable and helpful, supplying me with first-hand information about these birds. Looking back, I realized how the

error occurred, but it was, nonetheless, totally unacceptable. I should've readily caught it in my proofing and reviews, but somehow, I didn't. My deepest apologies are extended to Dr. Roy Crawford for this serious error.

— Doug Ottinger

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## HENS AND CHICKS

I have a question about chicks and mama hens. We have three hens (out of 11) that went broody and hatched some babies. Now they're all being mean to each other and each other's babies. If another hen's baby gets too close, the hen that isn't the mama will peck at and even pick up the baby with their beaks. How do we go about introducing them to the flock, and will this behavior calm down as the babies get older? The three girls and all the babies are currently separated from the flock.

Danielle

It would be best, at least for the first week or so, if each hen could have her own space with her babies. They don't take kindly to babies that aren't their own. And while this behavior from the mamas won't change, as the babies get bigger, they'll be better able to stay out of the way of hens who aren't their mother. If the mother hens aren't accepting of other

babies now, they likely won't be in the future. I've had hens in the past that shared mothering duties between their two clutches with no problem, but many hens absolutely won't accept any chick that isn't hers. Just like when they go in with the rest of the flock and the babies have to avoid other hens, they'll also have to avoid other mamas.

Audra



## BROODY OR NOT?

I've been a big fan of your magazine for quite some time now. My free-range pet Silkie known as Mama Holly had been brooding for about the past month. She's a bit older, as she lives with her son, Mr. Indigo.

However, she's not setting on any eggs. She acts just like a

brooding chicken, and whenever we get close to her, she pecks at us to go away. We know for sure that there aren't any eggs underneath her, so what's going on?

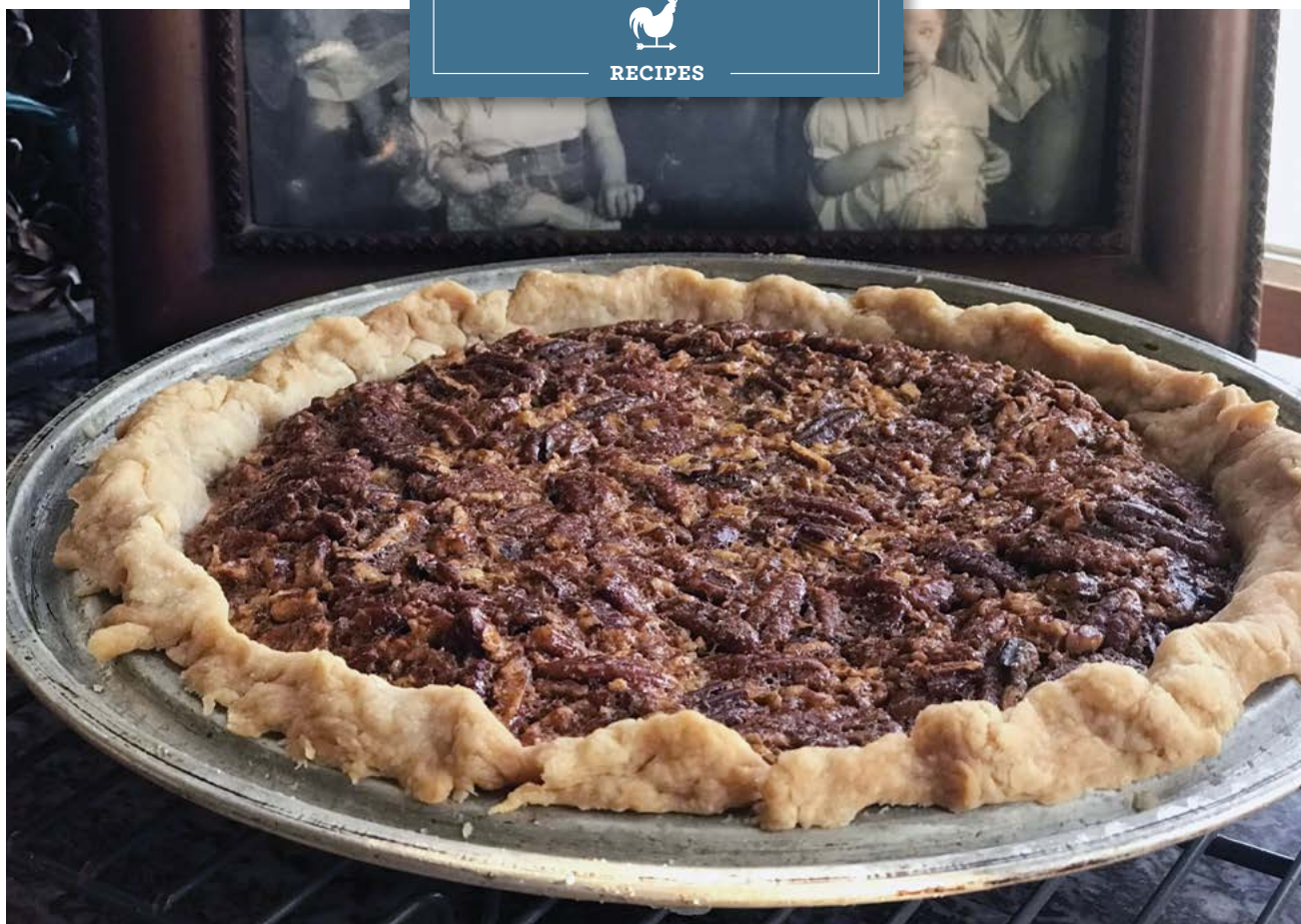
Katie Chludzinski

It's interesting because sometimes chickens go broody without any eggs in the nest. I have a six-year-old partridge cochon and she does the same thing. It's funny, because to fill her nest, she'll steal eggs from the other nest boxes and put them under her.

I don't think there's necessarily anything wrong with a chicken going broody, but it's hard on their bodies, especially in the heat. I normally take my Cochon out of the nest box each day and put her in the yard. She's free to roam back up to the nest box and normally does. But at least I know she's getting something to eat and drink plus a little exercise.

When hens are broody, their pituitary gland releases prolactin, which is a hormone that causes them to stop laying. So if the loss of egg production is important, you can try to break her broodiness. There are some techniques, such as not letting eggs accumulate in the nest, repeatedly removing her from the nest, covering the nest box so the broody hen can't get to it, and moving the broody hen to a different house. But these techniques don't always work, so sometimes it's just better to let nature take its course. ●





# MAKE-AHEAD PIES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY RITA HEIKENFELD

**T**RUTH BE TOLD, when it comes to holiday entertaining, my anxiety level goes up several notches. Are you in that camp? If so, I've got a solution, at least when it comes to the dessert category.

Go right ahead and check holiday pies off that last minute to-do list.

How? With these make-ahead recipes for beloved "trad" pies: pumpkin with homemade pumpkin purée and my most-requested pecan pie.

This traditional duo shows up often on dessert sideboards. Bake in advance and store in the refrigerator or freezer. They'll be ready when you are.

For those of you blessed with winter squash, try the heirloom cushaw pie. Cushaw has a milder taste than pumpkin and harkens back to days gone by.

The crust for the pies contains a secret ingredient to guarantee flakiness.

Let's get those pies ready for company!

## PERRIN'S NO-FAIL CRUST

Perrin Rountree and I worked together at my Cincinnati cooking school. She credits her Georgia upbringing for her ability to make this excellent pie crust.

Enough for two regular pies or one deep-dish pie crust, you may have some dough leftover with the deep-dish pie. Refrigerate it for a couple days or freeze several months.

Baking powder gives a bit of a lift to the crust.

### INGREDIENTS

2 cups flour

½ teaspoon baking powder (secret ingredient)

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup shortening, chilled

½ cup ice water or little more if needed



## INSTRUCTIONS

Whisk together dry ingredients.

Cut shortening into ½-inch pieces. Scatter over flour mixture and cut shortening into flour until mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some largish pieces.

Sprinkle half the water over, stir, and draw the flour from the bottom to the top with a fork, distributing the water evenly. Add more water until the dough is moist enough to hold together when you roll a little bit into a ball. I usually use up all the water.

Divide in half and shape into two balls. Flatten into round disks.

Roll out on lightly floured surface into a circle, 2 inches wider than pie plate.

## RITA'S RESTAURANT-STYLE PUMPKIN PIE

Wherever there's a Frisch's "Big Boy" restaurant, chances are their pumpkin pie is a customer favorite. That's true here in southwestern Ohio where we live. Trying to clone the pie for home cooks is a daunting task. I think I've come pretty close with this recipe.

**NOTE:** The recipe uses canned pumpkin purée. I'll add a half teaspoon or so of cornstarch if I'm using homemade purée, as it's a bit looser than canned pumpkin.

If you want, add more of the spices to your taste.

## INGREDIENTS

1 9-inch pie crust, unbaked  
15 ounces pure pumpkin purée, (not pumpkin pie filling)  
12 ounces evaporated milk  
¾ cup sugar  
2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice  
¾ teaspoon cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon salt  
2 large eggs, slightly beaten

## INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.

Whisk pumpkin, milk, sugar, spices, and salt together.

Add eggs and blend until smooth.

Pour into crust-lined pan.

Bake 15 minutes; lower temperature to 350 degrees F, and bake 30 to 35 minutes or until set but still a bit wobbly in the center. It'll finish cooking as it sits.

Cool and serve with sweetened whipped cream.

Serves 8.

## FARMER BRUNER'S CUSHAW PIE

Bill Bruner is our neighbor and allows us to harvest hickory nuts and, in return, I bake cushaw pie for him. Drain squash purée overnight to prevent a loose filling.

## INGREDIENTS

1 unbaked 9-inch pie crust  
2¼ cups cooked, well-drained cushaw squash purée  
¼ cup whipping cream  
2 large eggs, lightly beaten  
1 cup sugar  
1 tablespoon flour  
Couple pinches salt  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg  
¼ teaspoon ground allspice  
Pinch cloves  
2 tablespoons butter, melted

## INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

Whisk squash, cream, and eggs together well.

Whisk in sugar, flour, salt, and spices. Blend well.

Whisk in butter.

Pour into crust-lined pan.

Bake 10 minutes, reduce heat to 350 degrees F, and bake 35 to 40 more minutes, until pie is set in center.

Cool and serve with sweetened whipped cream.

Serves 8.



Cushaw squash draining on left; pumpkin on right.



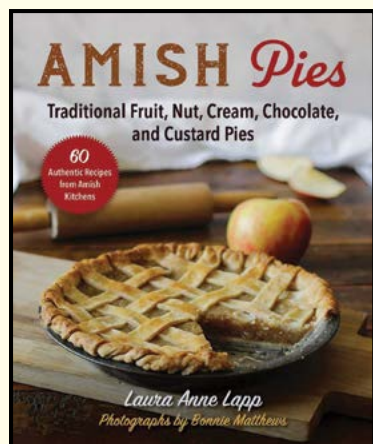
Farmer Bruner's cushaw pie.





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## Make Ahead

*To refrigerate:*

Both pumpkin and squash pies can be made ahead and refrigerated.

In fact, after 2 hours at room temperature, they should be refrigerated. The 2 hours gives them time to cool completely so moisture doesn't develop.

Store in plastic wrap up to 2 or so days.

*To freeze:*

Let pie cool completely, then wrap in plastic wrap and foil, or place in freezer container and freeze.

Thaw in the refrigerator overnight.

Some separation is normal upon thawing, but no worries. Just add a bit more whipped cream!

## HOLIDAY PECAN PIE

I use dark corn syrup. Light corn syrup gives a "softer" flavor.

### INGREDIENTS

Crust for one pie

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

1 cup granulated sugar

1 tablespoon brown sugar

3 tablespoons butter, melted

¼ teaspoon salt

1 cup corn syrup, dark or light

1½ teaspoons vanilla

1¼ to 1½ cups pecans, halved or chopped

### INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Beat eggs, sugars, butter, salt, syrup, and vanilla well with a whisk.

Stir in nuts.

Pour into crust-lined pan.



Bake 45 to 55 minutes, until toothpick inserted in center comes out fairly clean. Pie will puff up and jiggle a bit in center but will finish cooking as it cools 2 hours before serving.

*Serves 8.*

Bake up to 2 days in advance.

Cool completely, cover and store in the refrigerator. Remove one hour before serving.

*Freeze:*

Cool completely, cover with plastic wrap and aluminum foil. Freeze up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in refrigerator.

## Swap it out!

Ohio resident Teresa Oppold subs in hickory nuts for pecans. "I grew up on a Kentucky farm and have been foraging and baking with hickory nuts over 50 years," she says. Notoriously hard to shell, Teresa puts cured hickory nuts in the freezer before shelling, which makes cracking and shelling easier.

## Homemade Pumpkin/Squash Purée

1. Use smaller "sugar pie" pumpkins. Carving pumpkins contain less flesh with more water. For cushaw, you'll need at least 2 pounds.
2. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
3. Cut pumpkin in half. For cushaw, cut into manageable pieces. Scoop out seeds and stringy pulp.
4. Place cut-side up or down, on lined baking sheet.
5. Roast 45 to 60 minutes, until flesh is really tender.
6. Cool and scoop flesh out.
7. Purée until smooth.
8. For a thicker pumpkin purée, strain by lining a colander with cheesecloth and let it drain 20 to 30 minutes. For cushaw, overnight is best.
9. Store in refrigerator up to a week or freeze several months. ●

**RITA HEIKENFELD** comes from a family of wise women in tune with nature. She's a certified modern herbalist, culinary educator, author, and national media personality. Most importantly, she is a wife, mom, and grandma. Rita lives on a little patch of heaven overlooking the East Fork River in Clermont County, Ohio. She is a former adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati, where she developed a comprehensive herbal course.

AboutEating.com column: [rita@communitypress.com](mailto:rita@communitypress.com)



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CHICKENS, CHICKENS, CHICKENS

# IN-OVO SEXING

## *The High-Tech World of Chick Embryo Sex Identification*

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY MARK HALL

**F**OR DECADES, AN unsavory practice has existed in the arena of commercial chick hatching. Faced with harsh realities unique to the industry, hatcheries must get rid of a large portion of their chicks as soon as they're sexed on day one. If not, they'll no longer be able to make a profit. To discover this tragedy, and to learn how hatcheries can soon avoid it, keep reading!

Before going any further, it's important to understand that consumers want two things from chickens: affordable meat and eggs. To meet those demands

in the most cost-effective manner, the poultry industry has divided the breeds into two categories: broilers and layers. The first group is filled with breeds that are grown quickly to reach maximum meat productivity on the least amount of feed. The second group is made up of breeds optimized to lay eggs efficiently.

However, this system creates a jarring issue of which the vast majority of the general public is completely unaware. Because males within the layer breeds don't lay eggs and can't be quickly and efficiently converted into meat, there's no market for them.

Therefore, they're considered detrimental to the industry and are immediately killed after sexing.

Seven-billion day-old male chicks are terminated, globally, every year. Many are gassed, but even more, while still alive, are put through a waste management device which actually grinds them into a pulp. After this, they're made into a food source for other animals. Such could hardly be considered ethical treatment of healthy young stock, and while the hardship of chick hatcheries to stay financially afloat is well-understood, surely we can do better.

The perfect solution to the problem would seem to be one that could somehow prevent the formation of male embryos altogether. While this capability is unavailable, there's new technology that can do the next best thing. In-ovo (Latin, meaning "inside the egg") sexing can decipher the sex of a chick during gestation. This allows for the early removal of all eggs supporting male embryos, leaving only the females to hatch.

Initially developed in Germany in 2018, this applied science is already in widespread use across Europe. Based on the underlying research of Prof. Dr. Einspanier of Leipzig University, the Dutch German company, Seleggt,



became the first to successfully sex embryos inside the shell. This was accomplished on day nine of incubation by Biomarker detection. Still used today, this technique involves performing a DNA test to detect a female-specific allantoic fluid drawn from the egg. Its presence is indicated by the fluid color change: yellow for females, colorless for males.

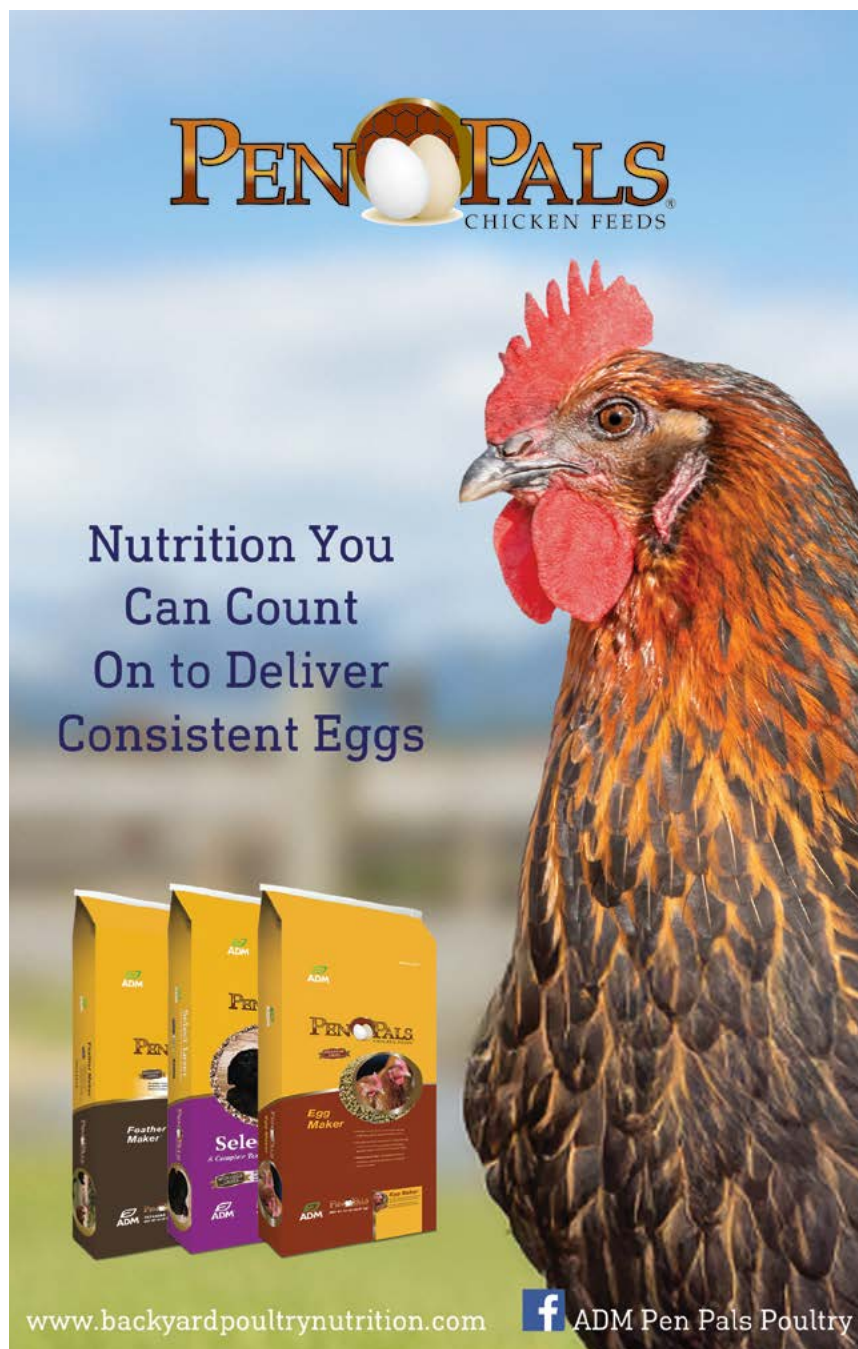
Another method of in-ovo sexing is called polymerase chain reaction, or PCR. Also dependent upon the extraction of allantoic fluid from the egg, this laboratory test identifies sex-specific genes by making copies of specific DNA sequences. This duplication is performed to better analyze the DNA in the original sample.

Although these methods are effective at solving the male chick culling conundrum, with a nearly 100% accuracy rate in sex identification, there are drawbacks, stemming from their need to extract fluid samples. Any needle penetration of the eggs poses a contamination risk and can even impair their ability to hatch. Therefore, at least a small number of more desirable female chick embryos kept in incubation may not hatch.

There are also non-invasive, or optical, forms of in-ovo sexing. Spectroscopy analyzes the contents of eggs by observing their interaction with electromagnetic radiation. Here, the manner in which light is emitted, scattered, or absorbed is measured to determine the chick's sex.


Several types of spectroscopy exist. Fluorescence spectroscopy examines fluorescent light emitted by blood cells when illuminated by lasers of various wavelengths. Raman spectroscopy observes light scattered by the egg's contents. Lastly, near-infrared spectroscopy uses electromagnetic radiation wavelengths barely past what we can see to note features inside the egg. Each one of these provides insight into the sex of the embryo.

Another optical form of in-ovo sexing is AI-powered imaging. This



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highly advanced technology is often used in conjunction with MRI and involves the use of machine learning and high-speed cameras. Here, an electromagnetic beam scans through the eggshell and makes a visual representation of the embryo. Thousands of eggs per hour can be efficiently processed with at least 95% accuracy.

Optical methods of in-ovo sexing have clear advantages over those that are invasive. Even though spectroscopy generally involves the removal of a tiny piece of eggshell from the blunt end for better inspection, there's no penetration of the egg. Therefore, the optical versions of in-ovo sexing don't present an infection risk, nor do they have a negative effect upon hatchability.

Despite all the benefits that come with in-ovo sexing technology, many American hatcheries are understandably concerned with the prospect of its high initial installation costs. At a cost of \$3.80 per in-ovo sexed chick vs. a mere \$0.95 for each traditionally sexed one, such an investment isn't cheap.

However, consider the cost incurred when incubating chicks. It's estimated that, every year in the U.S., \$500 million is spent incubating about 300 million healthy male chicks that'll be killed soon after they hatch. Naturally, with in-ovo sexing, this expense is avoided, partially offsetting the high startup costs for in-ovo technology. Also, as new advancements in technology are made, costs are expected to further decrease.

To date, a handful of American-based hatcheries have expressed an

intention to use in-ovo sexing techniques and to offer in-ovo sexed eggs in U.S. stores in 2025. Will more hatcheries follow suit? Probably, but not without our support. Look for the "humanely hatched" label on egg cartons in several of your favorite stores. Culling healthy chicks is wasteful. Support in-ovo sexing. ●

## RESOURCES

- Banis, Davide. "Dutch start-up In Ovo wants to save billions of male chicks from the grinder." *Forbes*, 23 November 2018, [www.forbes.com/sites/davidebanis/2018/11/23/dutch-startup-in-ovo-wants-to-save-billions-of-male-chicks-from-the-grinder](https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidebanis/2018/11/23/dutch-startup-in-ovo-wants-to-save-billions-of-male-chicks-from-the-grinder). Accessed 10 August 2025.
- Hussain, Grace. "Tech to end chick culling has now been implemented, but challenges remain." *Sentient*, 26 June 2025, <https://sentient-media.org/tech-to-end-chick-culling-implemented-but-challenges-remain>. Accessed 10 August 2025.
- "In-ovo sexing." *Innovate Animal Ag*. <https://innovate-animalag.org/egg-sexing>. Accessed 10 August 2025.



**MARK M. HALL** lives with his wife, their three daughters, and numerous pets on a four-acre slice of paradise in rural Ohio. Mark is a veteran small-scale chicken farmer and an avid observer of nature. As a freelance writer, he endeavors to share his life experiences in a manner that is both informative and entertaining. You can find him at [ThePoultryChronicles.com](http://ThePoultryChronicles.com)





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CHICKENS, CHICKENS, CHICKENS

# Tips for Keeping Chicks Warm Off-Grid

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY WREN EVERETT

**T**HE MOST IMPORTANT things to provide for newly hatched chicks are food, water, safety, and warmth. If you depend on heat lamps or electric brooder boxes to provide that last need, however, you can run into real trouble in the event of a power outage or mechanical failure. Here are my own tried-and-true methods for keeping chicks warm without the use of electricity.

As an off-grid homesteader, I have successfully used these methods to rear chickens without ever owning a heating lamp. That said, since I keep a small flock, my experience is limited to raising no more than a dozen or so chicks at a time. The tips I'm going to share are best used for 2 to 12 chicks.

Finally, if you're already used to raising chicks with heat lamps, you may find these methods to be a little unorthodox — after all, the literature is full of temperature requirements that have chicks bathed in a balmy 95 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the

first weeks of their young lives. With my approach, chicks are exposed to lower ambient temperatures. In my experiences, the chicks are easily able to adapt to life at 60 to 70 degrees F if simply given the opportunity. Furthermore, when it's time to move them outdoors, they need no “transition time” to adapt to the world's temperature.

## Use a Broody Hen

This might seem like the most obvious point to start with, but it's worth remembering that chicks need no additional heating in a natural situation. Their mother is their incubator, heat lamp, and instructor all in one fluffy, feathery package. Furthermore, she's on the clock 24/7. If you want your chicks to be completely cared for off-grid, consider allow-

ing one or two of your hens to go broody and raise their own clutches.

## Incubate Later

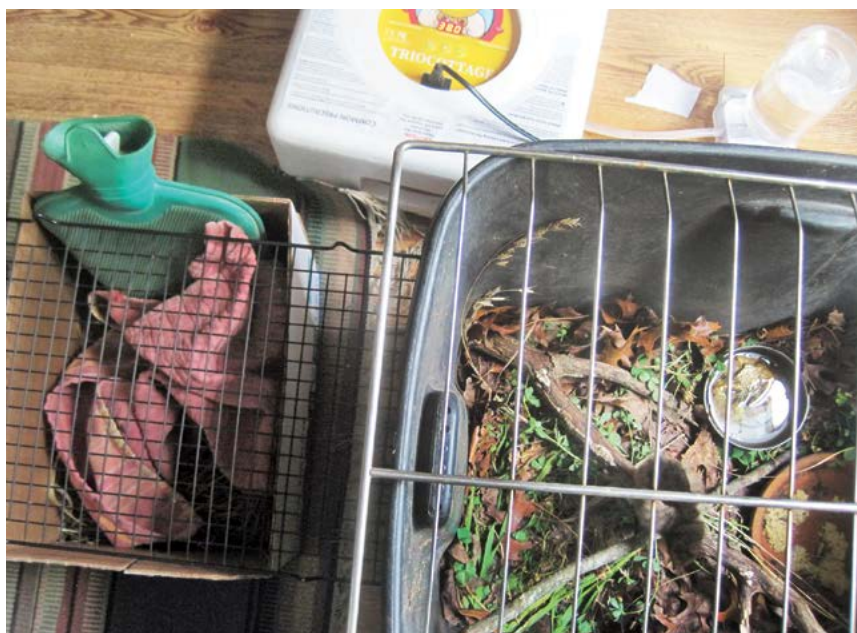
If you use an incubator to hatch chicks, you can save yourself a lot of heating hassles by starting a little later in the year, when the bulk of winter's chill has already passed. It's a lot easier to keep chicks warm when the ambient temperature is already in the 60s or 70s, rather than when icicles are still dangling from the eaves.

## Remove the Thermometer

This is one of my top tips if you decide to commit to raising chicks off-grid. This may seem heretical to those who are used to checking the thermometer every time they look at their birds, but removing it from your



Using a broody hen to keep her hatchlings warm naturally.



Incubator, portable brooder box, and sleeping box with hot water bottle all ready for service.



brooder box will force you to read your chicks, rather than the degrees. If the chicks are peeping happily, pecking at their food, and running around, they're warm enough. If they're clumped together tightly, making loud distress peeps, they need more heat. You may be surprised to see what temperature is acceptable to them once you stop controlling it.

### Make a Mobile Brooder Box

Without needing to make sure it's near an outlet, you can make an extremely low-cost brooder box in a simple plastic tote with some sort of screen over the top to prevent escapes (I use chicken wire weighted down at the corners). The advantage of using a tote is most obvious when you realized you can move the tote to where it's warmest anytime you need. Is it warmest in the kitchen? The covered porch? Near the woodstove? When your chicks are youngest and most vulnerable to the chill, simply move them to the warmest place you can access.

### Get Chicks in the Sun ASAP

Conventionally, chicks rarely go outdoors until they're fully feathered. But if you're raising chicks without electric power, you can still use a huge power source to warm them: the sun. Chicks are hungry for sunlight, and will soak it up, cat-like, if given the opportunity.

I move my portable brooder box outdoors from day one (weather-permitting, of course). Even if the temperatures are cooler, if the chicks are in direct sunlight, they'll use the sunlight to warm up naturally. Don't be surprised when you see them spread their little wings and bask in contentment! The sun can be so effective that you'll always need to make sure you offer a shaded section of the brooder as well. Chicks will go in and out of the sunlight as needed.

### Use Small Groups

When chicks get cold, they naturally clump together to conserve body heat and stay warm. This instinct



Two-part sleeping box.

can turn deadly, however, when you have too many chicks and a corner. Whoever gets pinned in the corner can get trapped and suffocated under the fluffy dogpile. If you limit chicks to groups of 4 to 6, however, they can still use each other's warmth without the risk of them trampling each other. Granted, this may mean you need more than one brooder box, but it's worth the trouble if it keeps your chicks from being smothered.

### Use a Sleeping Box

Night is the time when temperatures drop, and chicks need the most warmth. I use a "sleeping box" for my chicks at night, rather than leaving them in their unheated brooder.

The sleeping box is a small cardboard box, deeply padded with straw and covered with a "lid" of hardware cloth on top to prevent escapes. Basically, a sleeping box is a nest that allows their body heat to fill and warm a smaller area. I limit the population of each box to 4 to 6 chicks, again, to prevent any pileups. During the earliest two weeks (when it's usually the coolest at night), I also put a hot water bottle on one end of the sleeping box to aid with building up warmth. The box should be put someplace dark and warm for the night; then the chicks can be returned to their brooding box in the morning. Using this method,



Older chicks with two-day-old chicks.

the chicks are quiet and content at night — sometimes, the box warms so much that you can actually feel it through the cardboard!

I used this method one unenviable summer when I found myself with a solitary chick waiting on others to join it. I've also used a sleeping box and a couple of older chicks to warm hatchlings. In the photographs I've provided, you can see that I've divided the box into two sections — on one side, there's a group of month-old chicks and on the other side, three newly hatched chicks. The divider keeps the older chicks from trampling the new guys, yet allows their shared body heat to circulate.

I know some of these ideas go against the grain of modern, electrically powered chick brooding, but my flock is living proof that it can work. When given the chance to use the sun and each other to stay warm, young chicks can be surprisingly resilient off-grid. ●

---

**WREN EVERETT** and her husband quit their teaching jobs in the city and moved back to the land on 12 acres in the Ozarks. There, they're learning to live as modern peasants: off-grid, as self-sufficient as possible, and quite happily.





Cinnamon and oregano tea is beneficial to chickens during the winter months.

# Winter Teas for Chickens

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY ERIN SNYDER

**E**VERY SUMMER, CHICKEN keepers feed a variety of fresh herbs and plants to keep their flocks healthy. In winter, when herbs have ceased producing and gardens are overwintering, providing chickens with herbal tea may be the only readily available plant option.

Serving herbal tea to chickens is a good way to provide an extra boost of nutrition and decrease the chances of overwinter deaths in the flock. So, grab your teapot and some dried herbs, and let's get started.

## Does My Flock Need Tea in Winter?

All chickens, especially those living in northern climates, benefit from having winter tea. With the cold temperatures and less time spent outdoors foraging for plants and insects, backyard chickens' health can start to deteriorate. After summer, winter is the hardest season for chickens to survive, so it's extremely important to provide your flock with good immune boosters and other nutrients.

Brewing and serving herbal tea to your flock not only helps them replace some of the nutrients they've lost throughout the winter, but also gives their bodies an extra boost to prepare them for the egg-laying season ahead.

## A Cup of Tea

Brewing a cup of tea for your chickens is as easy as brewing one for yourself. Herbal teas are usually inexpensive, and many of these herbs and plants are probably already in your kitchen cupboard.



Bring one cup of water to a boil. Stir one teaspoon of dried herb of your choice into the boiling water. (Use only culinary herbs and chicken-safe weeds to avoid feeding your chickens plants that may be toxic.)

Steep tea for 10 minutes. Strain the plant from the water and allow the tea to cool to room temperature before serving.

### Serving Wintertime Tea to Your Flock

Chickens generally aren't very picky, but once in a while, you may come across a hen that's a tea snob. To prevent this from happening, always dilute the tea into one gallon of water.

Refresh tea water with clean water after 12 hours. Tea can be served several times a week or daily, depending on your flock's needs. How often you offer tea is a personal choice, but be sure to allow your flock some time daily to drink clean water to ensure that everyone is drinking.



The lack of vegetation in their diet in winter can take a toll on your flock's health.

### Cinnamon and Oregano Immune-Boosting Tea:

Cinnamon and oregano tea is my go-to when one of my chickens starts to show signs of being under the weather, or whenever I think they need an herbal boost. This tea combination may sound unappetizing, but these two herbs work together to create a poultry superpower tea.

Cinnamon has a positive impact on the digestive tract, working to improve digestion, absorb more nutrients, and improve feed utilization. An immune booster, cinnamon also helps keep chickens healthy and may fight off any disease or pathogens in the hen-house. However, this tea should *not* be given daily, as cinnamon may poison a bird's liver as well as cause diarrhea.

A strong antiviral and natural antibiotic, oregano is a popular herb for backyard chickens. Another good immune enhancer, this powerful plant is also an antioxidant, and a natural anti-inflammatory.



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## Helpful Hint

My chickens don't seem to care for the taste of this tea, so I add only one-half cup of tea per gallon of water.

### *Chickweed Inflammation-Reducing Tea:*

Winter is the perfect time to serve your laying hens chickweed tea. Not only did this herb earn its name because chickens love to eat it, but it's also extremely healthy for them.

Chickweed is antiviral, antibacterial, and is also believed to be full of antioxidants. This edible weed is also considered to be anti-inflammatory, reducing inflammation in the digestive tract, kidneys, respiratory system, and the reproductive tract.

## Helpful Hint

Plants can remain toxic when sprayed or treated with pesticides. To prevent your flock from consuming toxins, purchase from a retailer with certified organic plants.

### *Dill Digestive-Health Tea:*

While not commonly thought of as an herbal tea, dill is extremely healthy for chickens and is another good winter tea choice for backyard flocks.

Dill helps improve gut health and keep your flock's immune and digestive systems in tip-top condition.

Dill is thought to be antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antifungal, and antitumor.

### *Thyme Respiratory-Health Tea:*

In winter, when my chickens spend more time in the coop, I often reach for some thyme to keep their lungs and respiratory systems healthy. This herb is extremely potent and can help to prevent minor respiratory problems.

Thyme is also an excellent aid in repelling insects, so sprinkled throughout the bedding and added to the dust bathing area may help keep unwanted pests such as poultry lice and mites from the coop.

## Helpful Hint

While thyme has many health benefits, it's also a very potent herb. When brewing thyme into a tea for my flock,



Providing chickens with herbal tea will help them stay healthy all winter long.



I reduce the amount of dried thyme to one-half teaspoon of thyme per gallon of water, to ensure that my flock reaps the benefits without over-consuming this powerful health tonic.

#### *Parsley Vitamin-and-Mineral-Boost Tea:*

Parsley is one of my chickens' all-time favorite herbs. So, in winter, when I can't serve them fresh parsley, I brew them some parsley tea instead.

High in vitamins and minerals, parsley contains vitamins, A, B6, C, E, and K, and minerals calcium, copper, iron, manganese magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, selenium, and zinc.

Parsley also helps improve calcium absorption, is considered a natural anti-inflammatory, and is a great immune booster.

The teas mentioned in this article are just a few of the many kinds of tea you can offer your flock, as many culinary

herbs are good choices and safe for chickens to consume. By supplementing your flock's diet in winter with herbal teas, you can help keep them healthy and vibrant all season long. ●

#### RESOURCES

- *Fresh Eggs Daily: By Lisa Steele*
- *Gardening With Chickens: By Lisa Steele*
- <https://poultrydvm.com/>



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**ERIN SNYDER** and her family have raised chickens and ducks for nearly two decades. She is passionate about all things poultry but is especially interested in poultry nutrition, predator protection, egg-laying disorders, and helping chickens live their best lives well into their golden years. You can follow her chicken adventures on her newly hatched Instagram page: [www.Instagram.com/TheHenHouseHygge/](http://www.Instagram.com/TheHenHouseHygge/)

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# Why Do Chickens Eat THINGS THEY SHOULDN'T?

BY ANNA TWITTO

**I**F YOU KEEP A BACKYARD flock and leave a foam board lying around, you'll soon realize you've made a huge mistake. Your chickens will zoom in on it like it's manna from heaven and peck away, often ignoring both layer mix and pasture. My birds will also go after other nonfoods, such as plastic strings and chips of old paint, but the foam board takes the crown.

What's going on? Can't chickens tell the difference between nutritious food and blown-up plastic? And should you worry if you see your birds stuff themselves full of plastic foam?

## Why Chickens Like Plastic Foam So Much

Chickens are opportunistic foragers that will eat practically anything. They're constantly exploring their surroundings, looking for something to peck at — from grains and weeds to bugs and small lizards. I've seen my birds gobble up dog poop before I could blink. They'll also consume grit, such as small pebbles and sand, to help with digestion.

White plastic foam stands out against dirt, grass, and other darker surfaces. This color contrast grabs chickens' attention — which is also why you may have noticed your birds trying to eat shoelaces and buttons. Plastic foam is pretty soft and crumbles easily when pecked, mimicking the texture of food.

Moreover, chickens have a limited sense of taste. A chicken has around 300 taste buds (compared to humans' 8,000 to 10,000), located mainly at the back of their throat, so they're less likely to flag plastic foam as inedible based on taste.

## Is Plastic Foam Harmful?

While plastic foam isn't acutely toxic, it's certainly no health food. If ingested in large quantities, it could cause an impacted crop or block your chickens' digestive system. And, of course, the foam offers zero nutritional value. It could trick chickens into a sensation of false fullness, reducing their appetite for actual food. If consumed regularly, it might even cause a nutritional deficiency.

Moreover, plastic foam may leach harmful chemicals when broken down and exposed to heat. The World Health Organization considers it a probable human carcinogen.

## Other Nonfoods That Might Tempt Chickens

Apart from plastic foam, you may also notice your flock eating other materials, such as rigid foam insulation, zip ties, rubber bands, and various loose debris.





Chickens will typically go for items that seem edible and are easy to peck. Plastic-based materials, such as plastic foam are lightweight and crumbly, while string or bits of plastic can resemble insects. Hard, immovable objects such as concrete rubble and metal scraps are less likely to trigger your flock's curiosity.

## Help! My Chickens Have Eaten Plastic Foam!

Should you worry if your flock has already consumed plastic foam or other insulation materials? Don't panic. Small quantities of polystyrene will usually pass through a chicken's digestive tract with no ill effects. Over the years, I've occasionally caught my birds pecking at plastic foam or other stuff they weren't supposed to eat, and nothing bad happened.

However, you should still watch for crop impaction and other concerning signs, especially if your chickens consumed a large amount of plastic foam at once.

## Monitoring Your Chickens' Health After a Plastic Foam Snack

Keep a close eye on your birds for a couple of days after they've ingested plastic foam. Pay attention to signs of trouble, such as a poor appetite, reduced or unusual droppings, and lethargy. Check your chickens' crop early in the morning: it should be flat and empty. If you can feel a hard bulge on the right side of the chicken's breast, this could be a sign of an impacted crop.

If your chickens eat and behave normally, great. If you suspect a bird is struggling with an impacted crop, separate it from the others and avoid feeding it for 24 hours, but provide plenty of fresh water. A small amount of coconut oil can also help get things moving; freeze it and slip small, solid chunks into the chicken's beak. Try gently massaging the crop from the top down to loosen the blockage.

Once you see improvement, you can start offering easily digestible

foods, such as boiled eggs and plain yogurt. However, if the crop impaction doesn't resolve within 48 hours, or if the chicken seems to be getting worse, it's time to call an avian vet.

## COOP BEST PRACTICES

### Cover All Insulation

If you use plastic foam or foam board as coop insulation, make sure to cover it thoroughly. Your birds will continue to peck at any exposed corners and shred the material. Use plywood or another peck-proof barrier over insulation.

Likewise, if you use fiberglass batts to insulate your coop, cover them completely behind solid panels. Fiberglass consists of minuscule glass shards that can damage your birds' digestive tract if ingested. Loose fiberglass can also irritate chickens' eyes, skin, and respiratory tract.


Regularly, check your coop for any exposed insulation, especially around ventilation gaps and near doors and windows.

## Remove Attractive Debris and Offer Safe Treats

Keep any areas your chickens can access free of attractive but harmful debris, such as plastic, string, rigid foam, and old paint chips.

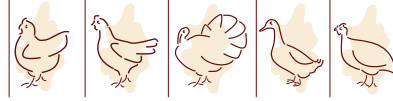
Offer plenty of safe, interesting pecking options, such as scattered grains or dried sunflower heads, or hang up a chicken treat ball with fruit or vegetable scraps. Enrich your poultry run with dust bath areas, logs, and ladders, or dump a pile of dry leaves for your birds to scratch through. Well-fed and entertained chickens are less likely to consume plastic foam. ●

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**ANNA TWITTO** is a nutritionist and self-reliance enthusiast.

Anna loves sharing knowledge about real food, raising backyard poultry, and handy preparedness skills. You'll usually find her tinkering around the kitchen or hanging out with her four kids and assorted flock of hens.





CHICKENS, CHICKENS, CHICKENS

# BRITISH HEN WELFARE TRUST

## Rescuing Hens for 20 Years

BY SUSIE KEARLEY



Jane Howorth. Photo credit BHWT.



Dog and a Lucia (hen) sunning themselves. Photo credit Dan Groves.

**J**ANE HOWORTH STARTED rescuing hens when she was 19 years old, after watching an episode of the British current affairs program, *Panorama*, entitled “Down on the Factory Farm.” It changed her life.

“It was transformational!” she says. “It showed veal calves, sows in crates, and chickens in tiny cages, where they spent their entire adult lives, before being slaughtered. It was the plight of the chickens that got to me the most. I became vegetarian overnight. I started writing to my member of Parliament, asking about battery hen farming (raising hens in cages) and asking for better labeling for eggs. He responded, saying what

a well-thought-out letter I’d written. At that time, I’d never seen a live hen, let alone stroked one.

“I did a bit of lobbying, then moved to Devon, where we had some land. I traveled the country lanes looking for battery hen farms. I found one and asked the farmer if I could take some of his hens to save them from slaughter. He agreed. I intended to take 12, but returned home with 34, which was as many as I could get into my small car, a Mini Metro.

“I stepped into the farmer’s chicken shed and was shocked by the darkness, the noise, the smell. Thousands of hens occupied a small area. That’s why I wanted to take as many as I

could. The farmer put some hens into a box, and others into a sack — something we wouldn’t dream of doing now, but I didn’t know how to handle hens then.

“I got my chickens home, and one hen was standing bolt upright like a penguin. The other hens were bullying her. She instinctively knew I could help her, so she waddled over to me and stretched her neck out, asking for help. My husband built her a separate area within the coop, so she could live with the other birds without being bullied by them. We named her Vicky.

“She had a friend called Myrtle; they got on very well. Vicky wanted to be near me all the time, because

I gave her treats. The hens free-ranged outside, and she walked into my kitchen to find me. She laid 64 eggs — I counted them — and I had such a strong relationship with Vicky. Her determination to survive and make the most of what she had was amazing.

“I spent a few more years adding to my flock, until I had 200 hens. For a few years, I went direct to an abattoir. I took the hens I wanted and went for the most poorly looking ones because I could see they’d had the hardest time.

“Then in 2001 to 2002, I lost my parents, too young. It brought home to me how precious life is and how, if you want to do something, you should do it. I decided I would try to do what the RSPCA do for cats and dogs, but for me, it would be a focus on hens. I thought I’d try to rehome a few hundred hens. I put an advert on Free Ad. It read:

“We’ve never seen sunshine, we’ve never tasted grass. We’re battery hens going to slaughter, and if you can offer us a home, please call.”

“My phone didn’t stop ringing! Most people who contacted me were delighted to help. They said they’d always wanted to help hens, or it was great that I was doing something to help. I rehomed 100 hens initially, then got better at finding farms that raised battery hens so I could rescue more.

“I worked with a local farmer, praying I’d find all his birds new homes, and I did! I asked for 50 pence (about 66 cents) per bird in those days, but we ask for more now to help us cover the charity costs! In the first year, with a bit of help, I saved 5,000 hens. That was 2004, and the number doubled year on year.”

In 2005, Jane set up the charity, the British Hen Welfare Trust to make it formal and add more structure to her work. Twenty years on, the number of rehomes has plateaued and the charity rehomed around 60,000 hens every year.

At first, promoting the charity was a lot of work. Jane contacted the

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Minnie, before. Photo credit Tammy Waine.



Minnie, after. Photo credit Tammy Waine.





## CHICKENS, CHICKENS, CHICKENS



Cornflake the hen on the pony. Photo credit Julie Howey.



Jane Howorth Highgrove. Photo credit BHWT.

regional press, the national press, and appeared on local TV and radio. Jane recalls one visit by a journalist: “My chickens were free-ranging, and I had one called ‘Bump’ because she had a bump on her head. While I was being interviewed, I called for ‘Bump’ who came hurtling round the corner and surprised the journalist! They don’t all respond to their names like that!”

Animal welfare is a sensitive topic, but Jane avoids confrontation and runs the charity by building bridges and developing positive relationships with farmers, rather than blaming them for catering to consumer demand for cheap eggs.

“I was approached by extremists who wanted me to take hens they’d stolen when they broke into a farm. I refused to take them because I want a good relationship with farmers. I want to have a positive impact, changing hearts and minds.”

Last year the BHWT rehomed their millionth hen — to King Charles himself! “I wrote to the King asking if he had room for three hens at Buckingham Palace and whether he’d like to take our millionth hen. He replied, saying he did have hens, and he’d like to take 30 to live at Highgrove Gardens! We now supply him with hens,



Photo credit BHWT.



so they have eggs from our rescued hens. Some are laid by Henrietta, our millionth hen! Henrietta and the other hens were transported to Highgrove Gardens in a luxury henhouse designed by Lulu Guinness.”

Other milestones include expanding internationally. “We’ve rehomed 100,000 hens through our sister charity in France,” says Jane. It’s called *Champs Libres aux Poules*, which means ‘free fields’ for chickens. We also have a cockerel rehoming page on our website that does well.”

Another highlight was the launch of a six-week online chicken husbandry course in 2022. It’s available free through *FutureLearn.com*. Over 4,000 people in more than 100 countries have taken the course. You can take the course now by signing up at [www.FutureLearn.com/Courses/Poultry-Health](http://www.FutureLearn.com/Courses/Poultry-Health).

Hens as therapy is one area they hope to build upon. “We have hens in

prisons helping people with mental health issues and we’re hoping to develop this in a big way. We have chickens living in homes for the elderly, in prisons, and in rehabilitation centres, all with fantastic results.

“Children with autism benefit from contact with hens, and we’d like to take hens into schools to get children thinking about animal welfare and where their food comes from, and to consider chickens as pets. We have two dedicated volunteers keen to get this off the ground and will soon be looking for funding.

“We want to reach hens we don’t take for adoption, too, via a farm advisory service. We gave advice to one farmer who had a high level of injuries among his flock, and we were able to solve his problems. We prefer to take a helpful, non-judgemental approach so the industry sees us as a source of helpful husbandry information.

“We’d like to expand internationally, and with the right person, we’re looking to open in the U.S. We need people who are able to work respectfully with farmers and influence what they do, rather than demand it. Get in touch, if you could be that person.” ●

[www.BHWT.org.uk](http://www.BHWT.org.uk)

**SUSIE KEARLEY** is a freelance writer and journalist who lives in Great Britain along with two young guinea pigs and an aging husband. Susie has been published in *Your Chickens*, *Cage & Aviary Birds*, *Small Furry Pets*, and *Kitchen Garden* magazines.

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CHICKENS, CHICKENS, CHICKENS

# Chickens at a **WELSH MUSEUM**



ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY SUSIE KEARLEY

**S**T. FAGANS NATIONAL Museum of History in Wales, U.K., has a 19th century farm, that's home to some lovely chickens. It was built around 1890 and furnished in the 1930s. It's now a museum piece, displaying vintage equipment and old ways of life for visitors to experience and enjoy. The chickens are part of the attraction and are much loved by those who want to learn about the animals that traditionally lived at the farm.

In the early 1900s, the tenant farmers kept chickens. They were part of the way of life.

During the First World War, imported food was in short supply and expensive, so Brits were encouraged to grow as much of their own food as possible. The farm flourished and grew abundant food, with many chickens providing eggs, which were at a premium. Today, it's still a working farm, including Welsh breeds of animals such as pigs, chickens, and geese.

Tenant farmers lived in the farm at St. Fagans until 1980 when the last family moved out and it became part of the Museum of Welsh life, opening to the public in 1981.

The chickens and ducks are part of the visitor experience. I met farmer Brian Davies, who looks after the birds.

Brian said: "Ducks and chickens would've been an important part of village life. In the 1800s and 1900s, nearly every farm kept chickens and





Farmer Brian Davies.



A cockerel on the lawn at the front of the farm house.

ducks for meat and eggs. We got poultry to show visitors how people used to live.

“Most of the birds we have now were bred from our own eggs on the farm. When we have broody hens, we let them sit and then put the eggs into an incubator to improve the chances of them hatching. One staff member took some home to hatch and brought the chickens back to the farm when they were ready to meet the flock. Most of our birds were hatched here from eggs, even when the eggs came from hatcheries.

“A lot of the chicken eggs hatched from our flock were male, so they were rehomed, as we only want to keep one cockerel to prevent fighting. In the 1800s and 1900s they probably kept 1 to 2 dozen chickens. Now we have just over a dozen.

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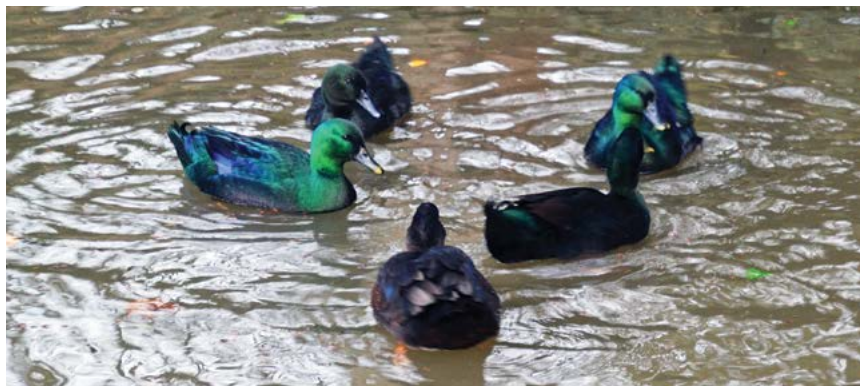
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Cayuga ducks from New York state.



The farmhouse.

“The ducks also breed, and we currently have three young male ducks that need to go to a new home because if they stay, they’ll give the female ducks a tough time.

“We have a mix of different breeds here at the farm. Some are heritage breeds, which would’ve been kept by tenant farmers in the past. We also have historical breeds of cattle and sheep to try and reflect the farm’s history.

“We have Orpington hens, Light Sussex, and Welsh Harlequin ducks — we need to get more of the Harlequins, as their numbers have dwindled. We also have Breckham Buff geese, crossbreed ducks, and Cayuga ducks from New York state. They have striking black feathers with a green sheen.”

I asked Brian if the visitors enjoy interacting with the birds. He said, “Yes, they’re popular, especially with youngsters!

“Children do chase them sometimes, but the ducks run to the pond and the chickens tend to stay away from children. They’re quite timid, not tame. There are fenced-off areas of the farm



Chickens in the yard.



that are a safe haven for the birds. The birds all have individual personalities, and some are bold and bossy compared to others, but none of them like to be too close to people. Dogs must be kept on leads, and if we see any issues with dog behavior, we'll have a word with the owner.

"We've had work going on in the yard recently, and the contractors sprayed a blue line across the yard. The ducks won't cross the blue line. They'll fly over it, but the line makes them nervous, and they won't cross it on foot. They don't like anything different in the yard, and if there's a car that wasn't there before, they won't go past it."

I asked how the birds help bring the history of the farm to life. Brian explained that they're very much an integral part of showing the history of the farm in action.

"The chickens form part of the educational experience when we have groups of kids, because we tell them how people used to keep the animals for meat and eggs. In the past, the family who lived at the farm might have gone to kill a chicken if they wanted a bird for Sunday lunch. Until then, they were kept as egg-layers.

"Today we keep the birds for show and for their eggs. We sell eggs to staff and supply the bakehouse onsite. There aren't enough eggs to supply the restaurant, but the bakehouse is a small bakery that produces traditional baked goods for visitors to buy."

I wondered if they'd had any problems with predators, because the birds free-range around the farm.

"We make sure the birds are safe and locked up at night," said Brian. "We do have issues with mink and fox coming onto the farm at night, but usually there are people around in the day, so the predators stay away during daylight. We have a member of staff who lives onsite,

and they put the birds safely into their accommodation after the site has closed, before it gets dark."

The farm sometimes hosts cookery demonstrations and lambing days, to help show visitors what life was like

in the 1800s and 1900s, before the farm became part of the museum. ●

Find out more: <https://museum.wales/collections/historic-buildings/18/Llwyn-yr-eos-Farmhouse-and-yard/>



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CHICKENS, CHICKENS, CHICKENS

# *Celebrating with the Birds*

## The Role of Poultry and Game Birds in Winter Festivities

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY SHERRI TALBOT

**W**INTER HOLIDAYS around the world are a time for feasting, celebration, and song. From the American Thanksgiving in November to the Chinese Lunar New Year, these feasts have traditional food served as an integral part of the celebration. And, just as the reasons for celebration vary, so do the birds and recipes that make up the dishes. Here are a few of the festivities and the poultry most associated with them.

### **The Day of the Dead: November 1 and 2**

This holiday involves family meals and offerings to honor those who've passed on. It's believed that the souls return for this one day each year, and they're welcomed with their favorite meals and sweets. Despite its focus on the dead, *Día de los Muertos* is a celebration — not a mourning — for deceased family members.

One of these traditional offerings is mole, pronounced “mole-ay,” which consists of chicken cooked in a sauce

of chilis, chocolate, and spices. Mole is technically the sauce itself, but for many versions, chicken or turkey is an inherent part of the dish. The exact recipe varies between families and regions, with different spice combinations making the dish green, red, yellow, brown, black, or pink. Every form of mole is time-consuming to make, though modern technologies have made the processing easier. Whatever the color, the dish is believed to nourish the soul and is a common choice to offer up to the departed.

### **Thanksgiving: 4th Thursday of November**

Few American holidays are more festive than Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving: the symbolic meal of the Wampanog and English colonists (or pilgrims) celebrating community, compassion, and cooperation. The modern-day meal involves a turkey dinner, usually with fall vegetables, cranberry sauces, and pies made of fall vegetables. Large family gath-

erings are common, while initially it involved the entire community. The original meal most likely involved other wild birds such as ducks or geese and the now-extinct passenger pigeon.

### **Hannukah: Varied Dates**

One of the main foods for Hannukah is fried latke — a type of potato pancake. These are fried in schmaltz, a mix made of rendered chicken or goose fat that's cooked down with chopped onions. Schmaltz might be used as a spread or in cooking latke, matzo ball soup, and other traditional dishes. The process of making schmaltz results in bits of burned chicken skin, known as *gribenes*, that are filtered out and used as a snack.

Chopped chicken livers are also a specialty for celebrants — harkening back to the day when every part of the chicken was used. The livers are cooked in schmaltz, combined with onions, hard boiled eggs, and spices, and served on crackers, bagels, or rye bread.





## A Historical Christmas in the U.K.: December 25

While turkey and ham are often the modern-day choice for Christmas, this wasn't always the case. In Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Story," the dinner of choice is goose. For years, this bird was raised by communities throughout Britain who valued its feathers, down, meat, fat, and eggs. Flocks of geese were easy to raise on pasture in the summer, and young birds were butchered in the fall, rather than wintering them over. The meat was widely believed to be superior to that of other birds, and it wasn't until turkey became widely available that it began to overtake the goose as the Christmas dinner of choice.

For royalty, large gatherings during the holidays required a great variety of dishes, and not only goose, but swan would grace the table of nobility. Likewise, a special dish involving peacock was common. The tail and head would be left intact and arranged in a decorative style, while the body was roasted. While documentation of the time suggests this wasn't the tastiest of entrees, it apparently made for an ornamental dish.

## New Year: January 1

While sausage is a common New Year dish throughout Italy, certain regions are more partial to *faraona* or guinea fowl. This can be served in a number of ways, including roasted, braised, or *Faraona al Barolo* — guinea fowl cooked in wine, pork fat, sausage, mushrooms, onions, and spices. In Liguria, guinea fowl served stuffed or stewed is common. Guinea fowl are also known as a popular dish in parts of Africa and France for winter celebrations — though not necessarily for New Year's specifically.

On the other hand, some countries — such as Hungary — consider eating poultry on New Year's Day to be bad luck. It's believed that their scratching instincts are a sign of bad

luck for those seeking prosperity in the coming year.

## Lohri: Mid-January/Midwinter

Celebrated in India, Lohri celebrates the return of longer days and is mainly observed with vegetarian foods. However, several chicken dishes are popular, including various forms of chicken curry, and *Lahori Murgh Choley* — a dish made from chicken and chickpeas. These aren't considered traditional meals for the holiday but are often still served.

## Chinese Lunar New Year: New Moon Falling Between January 21 and February 20

One of the most important holidays to Chinese culture, a number of traditional foods are included in the celebrations for the Lunar New Year. These dishes often symbolize family togetherness. A communal hot pot that includes duck may be served on the New Year's Eve to signify the importance of family.

Whole chicken is also considered a dish for family bonding. Some regions also consider it a way to honor previous generations. The preparation for this dish varies among Asian cultures — south China tradition serves it steamed or boiled, while roasting is more common in Vietnamese culture. Some households might serve the whole chicken with the head and feet intact, symbolizing a hope for family unity.

## Conclusion

The role of poultry, waterfowl, and game birds in holiday celebrations varies among different countries and cultures. Recipes and preferences may even vary in different regions of the same country or be modified over time as one bird becomes more available than another. No matter these changes though, the importance of fowl in celebration — around the world — is undeniable. ●

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**SHERRI TALBOT** is the co-owner and operator of Saffron and Honey Homestead in Windsor, Maine. She raises endangered, heritage-breed livestock and hopes someday to make education and writing on conservation breeding her full-time job. Details can be found at [SaffronandHoneyHomestead.com](http://SaffronandHoneyHomestead.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/SaffronandHoneyHomestead](http://www.facebook.com/SaffronandHoneyHomestead).

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BREED PROFILE:

# THE REDCAP CHICKEN

BY KENNY COOGAN  
PHOTOS BY CHRISTINE TAYLOR, SECRETARY OF THE DERBYSHIRE REDCAP CLUB.

**I**F YOU’VE EVER seen a chicken with a comb so wide it looks like it’s wearing a crown, you might’ve met a Redcap. And if you haven’t — well, let me introduce you to one of the most underappreciated, overqualified breeds still scratching its way through history.

Redcaps are rare. Not “sort-of-rare” like your neighbor’s lavender Orpingtons — rare like “priority status” on the Rare Breed Survival Trust’s watchlist in the U.K., and “Critical” on The Livestock Conservancy’s Conservation Priority List here in the U.S. They are from the Pennine hills of Northern England, where they were once the go-to bird for farmers who needed a tough, dual-purpose chicken that could handle cold weather and still lay a lot of eggs.

“They’re a light breed of chicken, with rich, nut-brown feathers that end in a black half-moon ‘spangle,’” explains Leila Temprell, selling coordinator of the Derbyshire Redcap Club. “Their most distinguishing feature is their large rose comb, or ‘cap’ as it’s known and from which the breed derives its name.”

That comb isn’t just for show — it’s the breed’s namesake and calling card. And when you see it in person it’s hard not to stare.

## Breed Snapshot: Derbyshire Redcap

Origin	Pennine region, England
First Records	Mid-18th century
Purpose	Dual-purpose (meat and eggs)
Comb Type	Large rose comb (“cap”)
Egg Color	White to Slightly Tinted
Egg Size	Medium to Large
Weight	Male 7.5 pounds/ Female 6 pounds
Feathering	Nut-brown with black spangles
Leg Color	Slate grey
Temperament	Hardy, active foragers
Conservation	Critical (U.S.), Priority (U.K.)

## A Bird Built for the Elements

Redcaps aren't fluffy lap chickens. They're lean, alert, and built for work. Their slate-grey legs carry them across the pasture with purpose, and their foraging instincts make them ideal for free-range setups. If you're in a colder climate and want a breed that won't flinch at a frost, Redcaps are worth a look.

"They're regarded to be a hardy Northern bird, tolerant of cooler and harsher climates," Leila says. "Their popularity began with farmers, as their active foraging made them economic to keep. They also had a good laying capacity, and their eggs were sold at the local markets. These traits are still true of the breed today."

## Royal Roots at Chatsworth

One of the most charming chapters in the Redcap's story comes from Chatsworth estate in Derbyshire. Their love of poultry helped preserve the breed, and today, the Estate continues that tradition.



Redcap cock.



Redcap hen.

"The late Duchess of Devonshire had a passion for chickens, especially the rare native breeds such as the Redcaps, which she kept here at Chatsworth," Temprell shares.

The estate's farm park now features a sign created by the Derbyshire Redcap Club, educating visitors and encouraging new keepers to join the movement.

"The estate are keen breeders of Redcaps, and the sign helps provide visitors to their farm park with information and helps the club recruit new members."

Temprell explains. "It also supports the breed if more people start keeping them, having seen them at Chatsworth."

That kind of visibility is exactly what rare breeds need. When people see Redcaps in person — see that comb, those spangles, that confident strut — they start thinking about adding a few to their flock.

## Why Redcaps Matter — Especially Now

In 2025, *Backyard Poultry* has been spotlighting breeds that are considered



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critically endangered by The Livestock Conservancy. These are birds on the brink — genetically valuable, culturally significant, and dangerously

close to disappearing. The Derbyshire Redcap fits that bill perfectly.

That's why I wanted to dig deeper. I didn't just want to write about Redcaps

— I wanted to find them. I searched for Redcaps in the U.S., and there weren't many. After scanning hatchery listings and breeder directories, the only hatchery I could find offering them was Murray McMurray.

So, I'm grateful that Leila Temprell of the Derbyshire Redcap Club, responded to my email with a wealth of information and genuine enthusiasm.

### Want to Learn More?

Visit the Derbyshire Redcap Club at [www.DerbyshireRedcapClub.org](http://www.DerbyshireRedcapClub.org). UK for breed history, photos, and membership info. Their resources are great for anyone interested in heritage poultry, even if they're stateside.

### Why Redcaps Belong in American Backyards

Redcaps aren't just pretty birds — they're productive. They lay medium-sized white-tinted eggs, are good foragers, and bring a touch of old-world charm.

They're also a joy to watch. With their slate-grey legs and flamboyant combs, Redcaps bring personality to any flock. And for those interested in conservation, keeping Redcaps is a tangible way to support genetic diversity and rural heritage.

### Comments from the Coop

Redcaps are survivors. They've weathered centuries of change, from market stalls in the 1700s to modern conservation efforts. They're tough, economical, and undeniably stylish. And while they may not be the flashiest breed on the block, they've got grit — and that's something every good chicken keeper can admire.

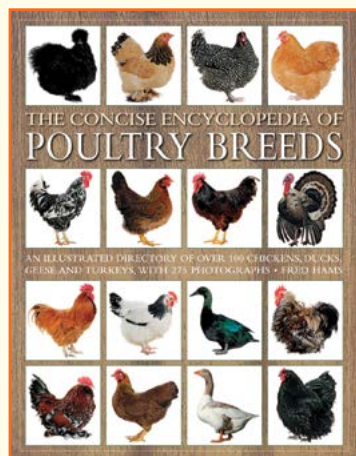
If you're looking to add a bird with history, heart, and a comb that could win a pageant, consider the Redcap. They're more than just a pretty face — they're a living link to the past, and a worthy investment in the future of poultry. ●



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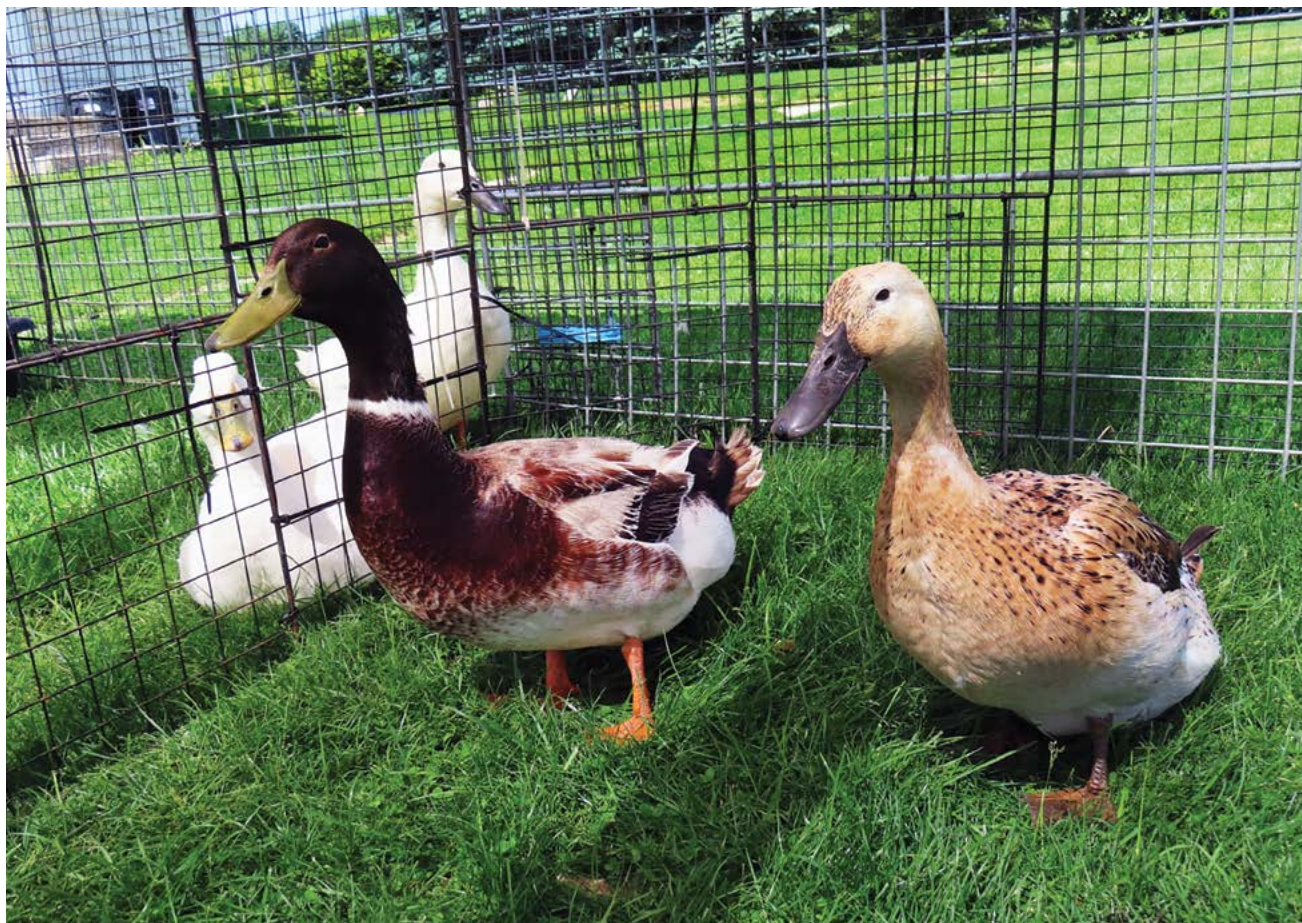
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# Arthritis in Ducks

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY ERIN SNYDER

**A**S DUCKS AGE, their legs become more prone to arthritis. However, even younger ducks can become afflicted with this condition. If you notice your ducks moving stiffly and acting sore, here are a few things you can do to help them.

## What is Arthritis?

Arthritis is a condition of inflammation and swelling of the joints. Unlike humans, who can get arthritis in many parts of the body, ducks usually display signs of arthritis only in their legs.

Osteoarthritis is the most common arthritis seen in ducks. This condition mainly affects cartilage but can lead to a breakdown in bone tissue and cause bone erosion. As the bones break down, the duck's mobility levels will decrease until they're no longer able to stand or walk.

## Signs of Arthritis in Ducks

Ducks show a variety of symptoms caused by arthritis. These can vary from mild to severe, depending on how far the condition has progressed.

### MILD SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Stiffness when getting up or moving
- Joint swelling
- Moderate pain
- Slight limp



#### SEVERE SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Legs giving out, causing the duck to topple over
- Extreme pain
- Difficulty walking
- Lameness

#### Calling a Vet

Ducks suffering from mild symptoms of arthritis should be examined by a qualified veterinarian to confirm the diagnosis and rule out other treatable conditions, such as a broken bone or bumblefoot. When a duck is only exhibiting mild symptoms, good waterfowl veterinarians won't prescribe medication to treat the condition, as these medications can cause organ damage.

If a duck is suffering from severe arthritis, a vet visit is in order to ensure a duck hasn't broken a bone or dislocated a joint. When treating severe arthritis, many vets will prescribe an anti-inflammatory to keep the duck



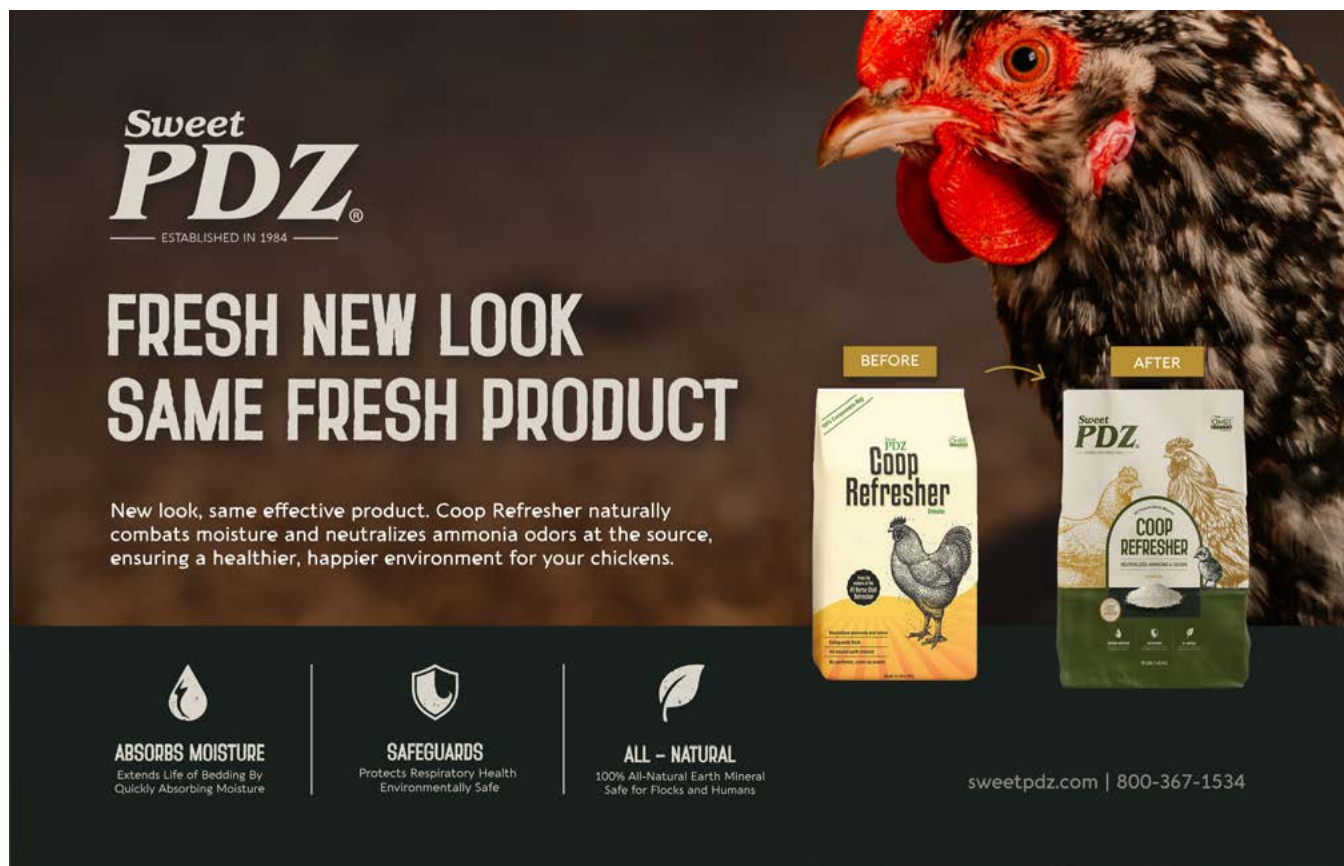
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comfortable. If the duck is beyond help, a vet will suggest a humane euthanasia.

### Providing Ducks with Natural Anti-inflammatories

Unlike prescription forms, natural anti-inflammatories are safe for long term usage and should pose no known health risk for waterfowl. Many herbs and weeds are known

for their anti-inflammatory properties, including:

- Calendula
- Chamomile
- Chickweed
- Dandelion (All parts of the plant are edible including the roots)
- Dill
- Fennel Seed
- Lovage

- Stinging Nettle
- Turmeric
- Violet
- Yarrow

Before feeding these or other natural anti-inflammatories, check with your vet or county extension office to be sure they're safe for ducks to consume.

While it'll take time, adding even one or two of these herbs as part of your duck's daily diet may help slow down the arthritis and keep your duck comfortable.

### Preventing Arthritis:

Preventing arthritis isn't always possible, but there are a few things you can do to keep your ducks' legs healthy.

1. Keep ducks at a healthy weight. Ducks that are overweight have an increased chance of developing arthritis.
2. Feed your duck flock a specific duck-formulated feed, that's rich in niacin (growing ducklings need 55 mg/kg of niacin daily. Adults need 50 mg/kg daily) to help keep their legs nimble and healthy.
3. Feed natural anti-inflammatories throughout their adult lives to prevent arthritis from becoming a problem early on.
4. Keep a good male-to-female ratio to prevent both from becoming injured during breeding (potentially leading to arthritis later in life).
5. Prevent injuries from occurring by ensuring there's nothing for ducks to trip and fall over.

### Living with Arthritis

With proper care, ducks with arthritis can go on to live healthy, happy lives for many years. However, there are a few things to take into consideration to help these ducks live out their best lives.



## A Safe Coop and Run

Ducks with arthritis should never be allowed to free-range or swim on a pond or other body of water. Their impaired mobility makes them more vulnerable to predator attacks, and a slippery slope down to water can cause a duck with impaired legs to fall and break a bone.

Avoid coops with ramp or step entrances to help prevent leg injuries in both young and elderly ducks. Ducks suffering from arthritis can't jump into a coop via a step. Ramps are especially hazardous for ducks with mobility issues, as they can fall off of the ramp, or be pushed off by a flock mate.

Keep coops and runs free from tripping hazards by picking up any sticks, rocks, or other tripping obstacles, to prevent ducks from tripping and hurting themselves further.

## Easy Access

Ducks with arthritis will often have a harder time walking to food and water. Adding some additional water sources will make it easier and help your duck remain independent.

During feeding times, carry the duck to the feeder and place a water bucket close by so it can easily access the water as needed.

Housing arthritic ducks in a smaller coop and run will make their living space more accessible for them and can go a long way to improving their quality of life.

## Swimming Considerations

Ducks suffering from arthritis often have a harder time climbing in and out of a kiddie pool or other swimming accommodations. This can prove to be problematic, as ducks must go swimming to keep clean and help their feathers stay waterproof and insulated.

From personal experience, the best swimming accommodations for ducks suffering from arthritis is the Tuff Stuff mixing tub. These tubs are deep enough for ducks to splash about and keep clean, while still being easy to climb in and out of.

In severe cases, ducks may require physical help getting in and out of the pool. During these times, be sure to stay close by to remove the duck from the pool as soon as it's done bathing.

## Additional TLC

As the arthritis in a duck's legs worsens, some ducks may need assistance in keeping themselves clean. A duck's underside and tail can become soiled due to limited movement and lack of coordination.

Having a spray bottle with clean water and gently misting the duck's soiled feathers before wiping it dry with clean paper towels is the best way to keep it clean in between routine swims. If you notice your duck suffering from soiled feathers, be sure to clean it right away to prevent flystrike.


Caring for ducks with arthritis may sound daunting, but it's a rewarding job. With some extra maintenance and some tender loving care, these ducks can go on to live happy, healthy lives. ●

## RESOURCES

- *The Ultimate Pet Duck Guidebook: By Kimberly Link*
- [www.majesticwaterfowl.org/mmissue123.htm](http://www.majesticwaterfowl.org/mmissue123.htm)
- <https://opensanctuary.org/https://opensanctuary.org/common-duck-health-issues/>
- [www.metzerfarms.com/nutritional-requirements.html](http://www.metzerfarms.com/nutritional-requirements.html)
- <https://ducksofprovidence.com/arthritis-in-ducks/>
- [www.hobbyfarms.com/5-potential-water-sources-for-domesticated-ducks/](http://www.hobbyfarms.com/5-potential-water-sources-for-domesticated-ducks/)

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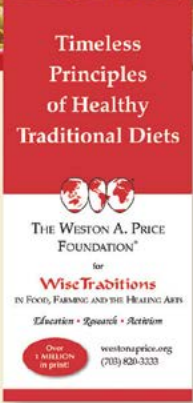
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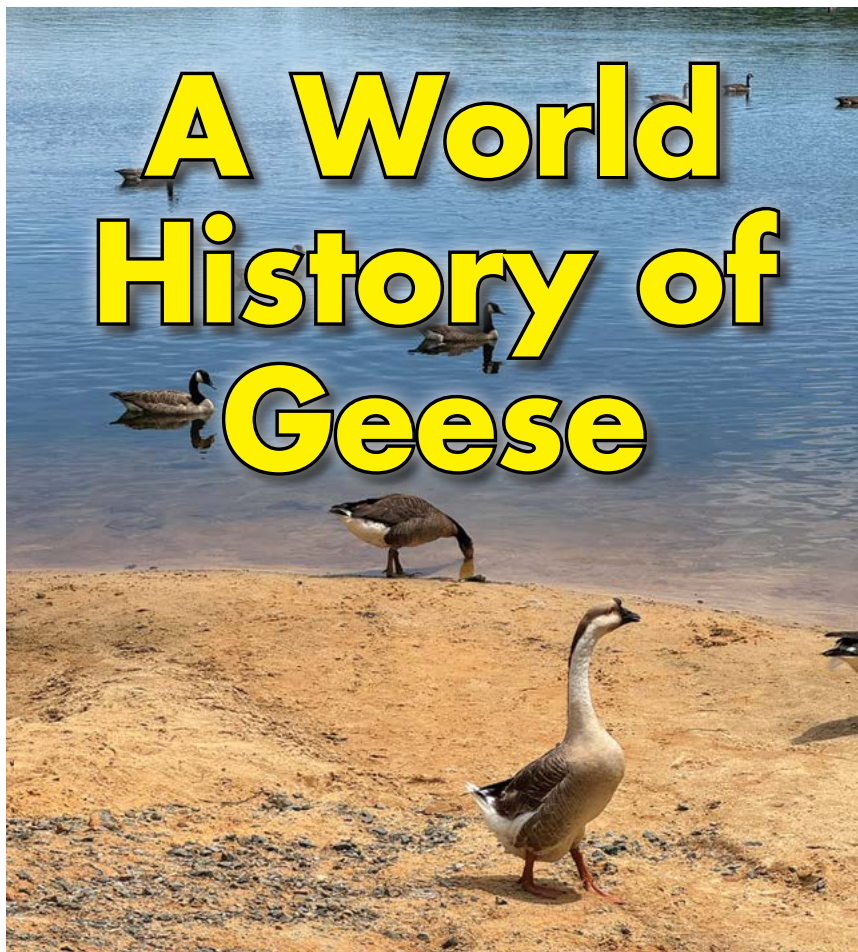
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# A World History of Geese



Chinese goose with Canada geese. Photo by Kenny Coogan.

## From Sacred Sentinels to Sustainable Farmhands

BY KENNY COOGAN

**F**OR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, geese have been more than just barnyard birds. They've served as sacred protectors, military suppliers, writing tools, culinary inspirations, and weeders in row crops. Their feathers have signed revolutions, filled mattresses, and launched arrows across battlefields. This article traces the global journey of geese — from ancient temples to modern farms — and highlights their enduring role in human history.

### Ancient Guardians and Sacred Symbols

Long before geese were penned in backyard flocks or paraded through vineyards, they held a revered place in ancient civilizations. One of the earliest and most enduring legends comes from Rome, where geese were said to have saved the Temple of Juno from invading Gauls. According to Dr. Richard A. Blatchford, associate professor of Extension in Poultry Science at UC Davis, "There's a story

about sacred geese at a Temple of Juno (Roman times), that alerted the temple of invading Gauls, thereby saving the temple. Although we don't know if that story is true, we do know that the Romans used geese as guard animals. Their natural vigilance and loud honking when disturbed fit the job expectations well. They're still used as guard animals today."

That instinctive alertness isn't just folklore — it's biology. Geese are highly territorial, quick to sound off at unfamiliar movement, and fiercely loyal to their flock. Their role as sentinels extended beyond Rome. In rural Europe and parts of Asia, geese were often stationed near granaries, gardens, and livestock pens. Their honks served as early warning systems against predators and thieves, long before motion sensors and electric fencing.

Even today, geese are deployed as biological security systems.

### Feathers and Warfare: The Medieval Arrow Economy

During the Hundred Years' War (1337 to 1453), England's demand for goose feathers skyrocketed. Archers needed fletching for their arrows, and the government responded with a mandate: Six feathers from every goose were to be collected and delivered to the Tower of London. Sheriffs were tasked with gathering these feathers, which were essential for military campaigns against France.

The Battle of Crécy in 1346 exemplifies this need. English archers reportedly fired half a million arrows in a single day. Each arrow required three feathers — typically two from male geese for the outer vanes and one from a female for stabilization.

Most of the above information comes from the very fun podcast, "There's No Such Thing as a Fish." While it's historically accurate that arrows required three feathers, and goose feathers were the standard due to their durability and aerodynamic properties,

it's hard to confirm that the archers were identifying male vs female feathers. The practice of using two outer vanes from male geese and one stabilizing vane from a female goose is plausible and aligns with traditional fletching techniques, though direct documentation of sex-specific feather use is scarce.

### The Age of the Quill: Writing with Wings

From roughly 600 to 1800 CE, nearly everything written in Europe was penned with goose feathers. Quill pens were the primary writing instrument, and their design was surprisingly nuanced. Feathers from the left wing were preferred for right-handed writers, and vice versa. The curvature of the feather helped guide the hand across the page.

Dr. Blatchford adds, "It was goose quills that were used to sign the Magna Carta and the Declaration of



Cotton Patch Geese in SC. Photo by Jeanette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy.



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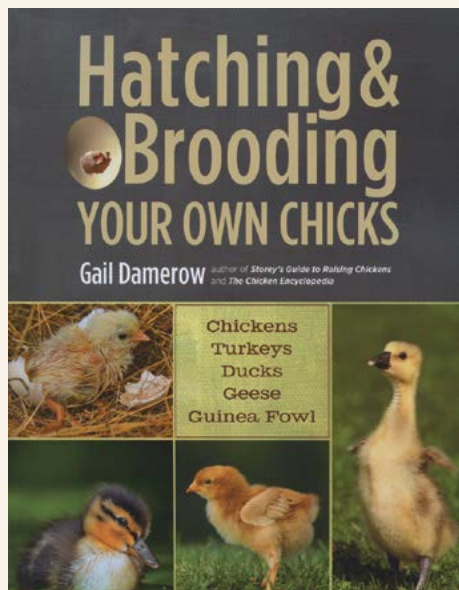




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Independence.” These iconic documents owe part of their legacy to the humble goose.

The word “pen” itself traces back to the Latin *penna*, meaning “feather” or “wing.” Through Old French (*pene*) and Middle English, the term evolved into the writing tool we know today.

### **Domestic Comforts and Military Innovation**

Beyond the desk, goose down became synonymous with warmth and luxury. Pillows, mattresses, and winter clothing were stuffed with the soft underfeathers, prized for their insulating properties.

In wartime, goose quills found another use. During the American Revolution, they were repurposed as quick matches — small fuses filled with gunpowder and inserted into cannons to ignite the charge. Their hollow shafts made them ideal for this explosive task.

During the American Revolution, artillery crews relied on a variety of ignition methods to fire cannons. One of the most effective was the use of quick match, a fast-burning fuse made from cotton string soaked in black powder. To deliver this ignition into the cannon’s touch hole, soldiers often used goose quills as delivery tubes. The hollow shaft of the feather was ideal for holding a small amount of powder and guiding the flame directly into the breech.

As described in Revolutionary War artillery manuals and reenactment sources, the process typically involved inserting the powder-filled goose quill into the cannon’s vent hole. A slow match — a length of smoldering rope — was then touched to the quill to ignite the charge.

### **Golf and the Feathery Elite**

In the 17th and 18th centuries, goose feathers entered the world of sport. Early golf balls, known as

“featheries,” were made by stuffing wet cowhide with goose feathers. As the hide dried and shrank, the feathers expanded, creating a solid ball. The process was so labor-intensive that a single ball could cost more than a set of clubs.

It’s said that each ball contained enough feathers to fill a top hat. This made golf a pastime for the wealthy, with feather economics shaping who could afford to play.

### Culinary Innovation in Qing Dynasty China

You might think fake meat is a 21st-century invention, born from modern plant-based movements and food tech startups. But the concept has deep historical roots. As far back as

the 18th century, Chinese chefs were crafting convincing meat substitutes using tofu skin, mushrooms, and root vegetables. Yuan Mei (1716 to 1798), a celebrated poet and gastronome of the Qing Dynasty, created one of the earliest known versions of “vegetarian goose” using tofu skin and purple yam (*ube*). Promoted as a Buddhist-friendly alternative, his dish mimicked the

texture and appearance of roast goose and remains a staple in Chinese plant-based cuisine today.

### Tools and Implements

In both Indigenous and colonial settings, goose bones were repurposed into tools. Their size and density made them suitable for crafting awls, needles, fish-



Dewlap Toulouse. Photo by Jeanette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy.



Young Chinese goose. Photo by Jeanette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy.

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hooks, and even small chisels. Archaeological digs at sites such as Jamestowne (Virginia) have uncovered goose bones showing signs of butchery, burning, and tool shaping. These modifications suggest that settlers and Native peoples both used goose bones not just for sustenance, but for everyday utility.

At Historic Jamestowne, over 450 goose bones have been cataloged from early 17th-century contexts. Many show cut marks and human tooth impressions, indicating that geese were a vital food source during periods of scarcity — especially during the “Starving Time” of 1609 to 1610. Canada geese, which migrated seasonally through Virginia, were hunted extensively, while domestic geese brought from England supplemented colonial diets.

### Goose Breeds and Their Origins

The Steinbacher goose, developed in eastern Germany in the early 20th century, was originally bred for goose

fighting — a traditional sport in parts of Europe. Known for their confident demeanor and upright carriage, Steinbachers are alert, active, and visually distinctive, with orange bills edged in black “lipstick.” Though no longer used for fighting, they retain a bold temperament and are now valued for exhibition and conservation.

Modern goose breeds trace their lineage to two wild ancestors: the Greylag

goose and the Asian Swan goose. Jeanette Beranger, senior program manager at The Livestock Conservancy, explains, “The Greylag goose is a wild goose from which most goose breeds have been developed except Chinese and African, which were developed from the Asian Swan goose.”

The American Poultry Association began formally recognizing goose breeds in 1874. Here’s a brief timeline:

Breed	American Poultry Association Admission Year	Origin
African	1874	Derived from Swan goose
Buff	1947	United States
Chinese	1874	Derived from Swan goose
Emden	1874	Germany
Pilgrim	1939	United States
Sebastopol	1938	Eastern Europe
Toulouse	1874	France



Steinbacher pair. Photo by Jeanette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy.

## Modern Agriculture: Geese as Farmhands

Geese continue to serve practical roles on farms, particularly in integrated pest management systems. Dr. Gregory P. Martin, poultry specialist and educator, notes, “Geese have been used for food, feathers, and eggs for quite some time. One unique use was as weeding geese on farms, especially row crops.”

I saw this firsthand during a visit to Vergenoegd Löw Wine Estate in South Africa. After a 12-hour flight, I went straight to the vineyard — not for the wine, but to witness their flock of 1,600 Indian Runner ducks and over 100 geese in action. The ducks forage for snails and other pests among the grapevines, while the geese serve as security guards, protecting the ducks and helping control weeds. Watching the geese patrol the breeding pens and join the duck parade across the estate was a vivid reminder of how poultry can be both practical and picturesque.

The farm’s manager explained that the geese weren’t just ornamental — they were part of a larger sustainability effort that included solar power, water recycling, and composting. It was an example of how traditional animal roles are being reimagined in modern agriculture. Read the full article in the June/July 2019 issue of *Backyard Poultry*.

Dr. Martin notes a shift in water usage among American goose growers: “Many growers in the U.S. raise birds this way, but many are going ‘water free/dry’ to save water.”

Traditionally, geese are associated with ponds and open water, where they

bathe, forage, and socialize. But in regions facing drought or water restrictions, farmers are adapting by raising geese without access to standing water. Instead, they provide clean drinking water in troughs or nipple systems and rely on dry bedding and rotational grazing to keep birds healthy.

This “dry” method reduces water waste and environmental runoff while still supporting the birds’ natural grazing behavior. It also lowers the risk of waterborne illness and simplifies waste management — especially in small-scale or urban settings where water conservation is critical. Despite the lack of ponds, geese raised this way remain productive and resilient, especially when given access to pasture and shade.

For growers in arid regions or those practicing regenerative agriculture, dry goose husbandry offers a sustainable alternative that aligns with broader conservation goals. It’s a reminder that even waterfowl can adapt to changing landscapes — without compromising welfare or performance.

While geese are remarkably adaptable, some of the heavier breeds — such as Toulouse, Embden, and African — benefit from access to deeper water during the breeding season. According to waterfowl husbandry guides, fertility rates in these breeds are significantly improved when birds can swim and mate in water that allows full body immersion. Shallow puddles or dry land may suffice for lighter breeds, but heavier geese often struggle with balance and positioning during mating without buoyancy support.

This doesn’t mean every flock needs a pond. A livestock tank, wading pool, or even a repurposed barrel can provide the necessary depth. The key is ensuring the water is clean, accessible, and deep enough — typically 14 to 18 inches — for the birds to move freely. Outside of breeding season, these breeds do well on dry pasture, but during mating, water access can make the difference between a successful hatch and a missed season.

If you’re raising geese for exhibition or breeding, especially larger-bodied types, planning for seasonal water needs is a practical investment in flock productivity.

## Guardians of the Coop

Beyond the fields, geese are gaining popularity as protectors of poultry flocks. Their loud honks and territorial behavior make them effective deterrents against predators.

“One of my favorite facts is that they can serve as excellent guard dogs to protect their flock or flocks of chickens,” says Dr. Leonie Jacobs, associate professor at Virginia Tech. Their presence can reduce losses and add a layer of security to backyard operations.

Across centuries and continents, geese have proven themselves useful, adaptable, and surprisingly complex. From sacred guardians to practical farmhands, their contributions go far beyond feathers and eggs. Whether in history books or backyard coops, geese continue to earn their place in agriculture and culture alike.

## Goose vs. Duck — Etymology and Behavior

The word “duck” comes from the Old English *duce*, meaning “diver,” derived from *ducan*, “to duck or dive.” This reflects the feeding behavior of many duck species, which upend in water to forage.

“Goose,” on the other hand, has Germanic roots and is associated with vigilance and flight. While ducks are known for their dabbling, geese are grazers — with attitude.

In behavior and etymology, geese stand apart — both literally and linguistically. ●



Greylag geese.





# DUCK TALES

## Ducks Are Cuter Than Chickens, In My Eyes

BY CANDI JOHNS

**O**VER THE PAST YEAR, I'VE come to respect and not judge all those people who have a chicken running around the inside of their house wearing a diaper.

Nope. They're not weird. They're not abnormal. They just LOVE their chicken.

It starts innocently enough ... you bring home your peeping box of hatchlings. One becomes "the favorite." You're not sure if it wants to be in your lap because you're always holding it or if it's a lap chicken. Nonetheless, one of those cuties ends up becoming the family "dog." The next thing you know, there's a full-blown hen on your couch and she's laying eggs in your laundry basket.

Well, that's how I imagine it happens. I've never had a chicken living in my house. But — I've had a house duck. It may seem odd that we had a duck running loose in our home.

When I'd hear about people with chickens in their house, I tended to



think they were a bit off. No offense if you have a chicken running around in your home in a diaper. I get it now. I have a house duck and his name is Ping.

I got a call from my cousin right after we got ducks. She asked perfectly reasonable questions, for which I had no reasonable answers.

Cousin: "Hi. What are you doing?"

Me: "Playing with the ducks."

Cousin: "You have ducks?"

Me: "Yes."

Cousin: "How many ducks do you have?"

Me: "3."

Cousin: "Why did you get ducks?"

Me, hesitating: "Um ... because they were cute."

Cousin: "What are you going to do with them?"

Me, hesitating some more: "Um ... if they're girls, I guess we'll eat their eggs; if they're not girls, I guess ... well ... I guess we'll eat them."

My oldest daughter (Ping's person) declares from the background: "You're *not* eating *ping*!" Cousin laughs.

No, I didn't intend to eat Ping. I also didn't intend to eat Wayne, Teenyball, Gizmo, Curly, Red, Buff, Crazy, Chubby, or Dumpling, but I did. Because if you turn into a Gangster Rooster, snort and stomp the ground, chase my kids around the house, or make my baby cry, you go in the stew pot. But I'm sure Ping would never do anything like that.

If you're on the fence about getting a duckling or two this spring, here are some pros and cons on ducks:

## Pros of Having Ducks

### 1. ADORABLE

Sorry chicken lovers everywhere ... I wouldn't trade my hens in for the world. They give me eggs. They give me manure. They give me yard art. They give me entertainment. I love my chickens, but the ducks are cuter.

The quacking, the waddling, the swimming ... so precious! Since our ducks lived in our home for the first part of their lives, they're friendly.

### 2. FAST

The first time you get chickens, it seems like that first egg will never arrive. You feed. You water. You shut up the coop for them. And five months later, you may get an egg the size of a quarter.



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You won't be twiddling your thumbs waiting for your ducks to grow up. They'll blossom before your eyes. The only animal I've ever seen grow this fast is a Cornish Rock Broiler (meat chicken).

If you wanted to raise something other than a chicken to eat, and you wanted to eat it in four weeks, a duck would fit the bill. (A little duck humor there.) But we're not eating Ping. He's our first duck. He's our pet and we love him.

## Cons of Having Ducks

### 1. WATER, WATER, WATER

Good grief. Give a duck a cup of water and he'll make enough mud for four pigs. I don't know how they do it. The problem is that ducks must have water. Lots of it. If you're a duck, water is more than something to swim in. It's a nasal cleanser, it keeps the ducks clean, it helps them swallow their food, it keeps them parasite-free. It's mandatory.

Ducks need water to stay healthy, but if you don't have a natural water source they can get to, it may be messy. If you have a pond, creek, or stream, your ducks will be set. If you plan to use kiddie pools and drinkers, you're in for a disaster.

### 2. POOP

Duck poop is a different animal from chicken poop. It's bigger. It's goopier. It's grosser.

Once again, this isn't an issue at all if you keep your ducks free-range. I don't even know where the duck poop is around our place. However, if you have your poultry in a run, ducks may ruin your life.

I think the bottom line is that ducks are fabulous if you have some water available and enough space for them to run around. You won't be filling pools, cleaning drinkers, or cleaning up duck poop. ●



## A Surprise Duck Hatching

BY FIONA WAGNER

**T**HE BARN IS USUALLY A fairly noisy place first thing in the morning. The chickens are clucking, the rooster is crowing, the goats are bleating, and the ducks are quacking. Well, the Rouens are, at least. The Muscovies try hard but only manage a pitiful little squeak.

But on this day, I noticed another sound amongst the usual cacophony — a tiny “peep, peep, peep.” I looked down into the duck pen and there she was — our very first hatchling!

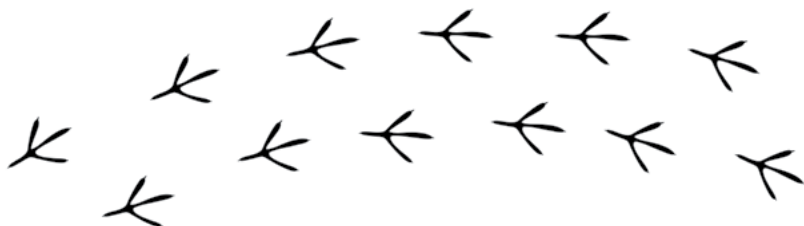
After screaming and scaring the heck out of the donkeys and horse (they're a little touchy before breakfast), I went tearing across the barnyard while shouting at the top of my lungs, “Go get the camera, there's a baby duck in the barn!” Once again,

providing ample entertainment for our barnyard creatures.

### How Long Do Ducks Take to Hatch?

We have two ducks sitting on eggs right now. One is in the feed area (she deserves her very own blog post), and the other is in the duck pen. Recently, I'd looked up the incubation period for ducks, and while baby chickens hatch in 21 days, Rouen ducks hatch in 28 days, and Muscovies in 35 days.

As this is our first time hatching our own — in fact, we're not hatching anything ... we just allowed the ducks to go broody and let nature take its course — I wasn't sure what to expect. I'm horrible at marking dates, but I didn't think she'd been sitting on the eggs all that long. I didn't even know if they were fertile, though I must say that our drakes are quite insatiable when it comes to their attempts at procreation.



Obviously, the boys did their job and so did mama duck.

### A Surrogate Mother Duck

What I find amazing is that the duckling isn't even technically hers. Mama is a Muscovy while the duckling is a Rouen. Doesn't seem to matter though. Lovely, isn't it?

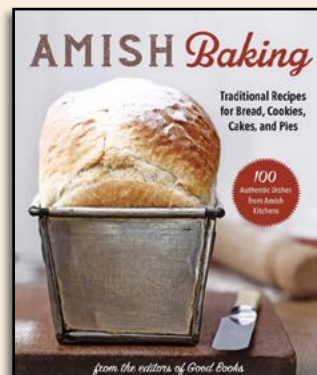
By the time I finished taking a bazillion photos and finally got the rest of the barn crew fed, I realized it was 11:40 a.m. Because we weren't expecting babies yet, we had no duckling food on hand and the closest farm supply store — which is 30 minutes away — closed in 20 minutes. What's more, it wouldn't be open again until Monday (it was Saturday).

I quickly called the feed store, explained my predicament and pleaded for them to stay open another 15 minutes. After some hawing and humming, the disgruntled voice on the other end of the line agreed, and 30 seconds later, the kids and I were in the truck and racing down the driveway.

It's a good thing, too, because when I got back with the duckling feed and put it and some fresh water into the pen, mama duck finally got off her nest and gave us a peek at the rest of her eggs. It looked like duckling might have some siblings soon.

In the meantime, I told the kids that mama duck needs her rest. She's going to have her wings full with this lot. ●

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COMING EVENTS



The Coming Events listing is gathered and provided by **poultryshowcentral.com**.

Add your show listing on their website or send to:

**Coming Events, Backyard Poultry, 1503 SW 42nd St, Topeka, KS 66609**

or email: [editor@backyardpoultrymag.com](mailto:editor@backyardpoultrymag.com).

To be included in the *Backyard Poultry* magazine listing, event details must be sent **90 days in advance**.

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**ATTENTION: Due to the avian influenza outbreak, some events may be canceled. Contact event coordinators to confirm before show dates. Poultry Show Central is working hard to stay updated, but changes are being made daily and these events may end up being canceled.**

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#### **ALABAMA**

**December 13, 2025**

**Anniston, Alabama**

Bama All Bantam Show

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Expo\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Expo_Show.html)

**December 6, 2025**

**Paso Robles, California**

Central Coast Feather Fanciers

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Central\\_Coast\\_Feather\\_Fanciers.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Central_Coast_Feather_Fanciers.html)

#### **FLORIDA**

**January 10-11, 2026**

**Lake City, Florida**

Florida Sunshine Classic

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Florida\\_Sunshine\\_Classic.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Florida_Sunshine_Classic.html)

#### **ARIZONA**

**January 10, 2026**

**Safford, Arizona**

The Safford Poultry Show

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Safford\\_Poultry.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Safford_Poultry.html)

**January 10-11, 2026**

**Hollister, California**

Gold Coast Poultry Fanciers

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Gold\\_Coast\\_Poultry\\_Fanciers.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Gold_Coast_Poultry_Fanciers.html)

#### **GEORGIA**

**January 17, 2026**

**Perry, Georgia**

Peachstate Poultry Association's

"Just Peachy" Classic

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Peachstate\\_Poultry\\_Association\\_Just\\_Peachy\\_Classic.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Peachstate_Poultry_Association_Just_Peachy_Classic.html)

#### **CALIFORNIA**

**December 6, 2025**

**Granite Bay, California**

Norcal Winter Classic Pigeon Show

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Norcal\\_Winter\\_Classic\\_Pigeon\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Norcal_Winter_Classic_Pigeon_Show.html)

**January 23-25, 2026**

**Lodi, California**

Pacific Poultry Breeders Association

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Pacific\\_Poultry\\_Breeders.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Pacific_Poultry_Breeders.html)

#### **IOWA**

**December 12-13, 2025**

**Des Moines, Iowa**

Pigeons on the Prairie

[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Pigeons\\_on\\_the\\_Prairie.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Pigeons_on_the_Prairie.html)

## **LOUISIANA**

**December 6, 2025**

### **Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Red Stick Poultry Club Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Red\\_Stick\\_Poultry\\_Club\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Red_Stick_Poultry_Club_Show.html)

**January 17, 2026**

### **Haynesville, Louisiana**

Pelican State Classic  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Pelican\\_State\\_Classic.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Pelican_State_Classic.html)

## **MASSACHUSETTS**

**January 17-18, 2026**

### **West Springfield, Massachusetts**

Northeastern Poultry Congress  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Northeastern\\_Poultry\\_Congress.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Northeastern_Poultry_Congress.html)

## **MARYLAND**

**December 6, 2025**

### **Centerville, Maryland**

Delmarva Pigeon Club All Ages Winter Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Delmarva\\_Pigeon\\_Club.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Delmarva_Pigeon_Club.html)

## **MICHIGAN**

**December 6, 2025**

### **Bay City, Michigan**

Bay City Pigeon Fanciers Winter Pigeon Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Bay\\_City\\_Pigeon\\_Fanciers\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Bay_City_Pigeon_Fanciers_Show.html)

## **MISSOURI**

**January 10, 2026**

### **Gray Summit, Missouri**

Spirit of St Louis All Age/All Breed Pigeon Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Spirit\\_of\\_St\\_Louis\\_All\\_Age-All\\_Breed\\_Pigeon\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Spirit_of_St_Louis_All_Age-All_Breed_Pigeon_Show.html)

## **NORTH CAROLINA**

**December 13, 2025**

### **Smithfield, North Carolina**

Cape Fear Poultry Association  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Cape\\_Fear\\_Feather\\_Fanciers.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Cape_Fear_Feather_Fanciers.html)

**January 10, 2026**

### **Morganton, North Carolina**

Friendship Poultry Club Winter Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Friendship\\_Poultry\\_Club.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Friendship_Poultry_Club.html)

## **OHIO**

**January 3, 2026**

### **Fremont, Ohio**

Fremont Pigeon Club Old/Young Pigeon Show & Swap  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Fremont\\_Pigeon\\_Club.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Fremont_Pigeon_Club.html)

## **OKLAHOMA**

**December 6, 2025**

### **Okmulgee, Oklahoma**

Morris FFA & 4H Booster Poultry Show [https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Morris\\_FFA\\_4H\\_Booster\\_Poultry\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Morris_FFA_4H_Booster_Poultry_Show.html)

**December 13, 2025**

### **Shawnee, Oklahoma**

Oklahoma State Poultry Federation  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Oklahoma\\_State\\_Poultry\\_Federation.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Oklahoma_State_Poultry_Federation.html)

**January 23-25, 2026**

### **Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

NPA Grand Nationals  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/NPA\\_Grand\\_National.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/NPA_Grand_National.html)

## **SOUTH CAROLINA**

**January 31, 2026**

### **Clemson, South Carolina**

Anderson Winter Bantam Show  
<https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Anderson.html>

## **TENNESSEE**

**December 6-7, 2025**

### **Knoxville, Tennessee**

Dixie Classic — Tennessee Valley Poultry Club  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Dixie\\_Classic.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Dixie_Classic.html)

## **TEXAS**

**December 6, 2025**

### **Klein, Texas**

Klein Poultry Extravaganza  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Klein\\_Poultry\\_Extravaganza.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Klein_Poultry_Extravaganza.html)

**December 20, 2025**

### **Denison, Texas**

Fur, Feathers, and Friends Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Fur\\_Feathers\\_and\\_Friends\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Fur_Feathers_and_Friends_Show.html)

**January 3, 2026**

### **Dripping Springs, Texas**

Brazos Valley Poultry Club — Blue Bonnet Classic  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Blue\\_Bonnet\\_Classic.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Blue_Bonnet_Classic.html)

**January 17-18, 2026**

### **Fort Worth, Texas**

Fort Worth Stock Show  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Fort\\_Worth\\_Stock\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/Fort_Worth_Stock_Show.html)

**January 31, 2026**

### **Lubbock, Texas**

West Texas Winter Classic  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/South\\_Plains\\_Bantam\\_Association.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/South_Plains_Bantam_Association.html)

## **WASHINGTON**

**December 6, 2025**

### **Chehalis, Washington**

All Things Poultry Event  
[https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/All\\_Things\\_Poultry\\_Show.html](https://www.poultryshowcentral.com/All_Things_Poultry_Show.html)

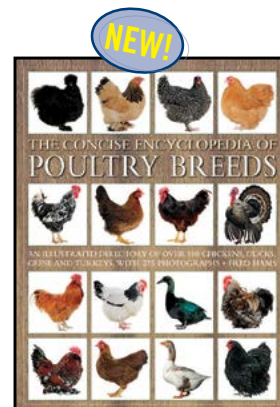




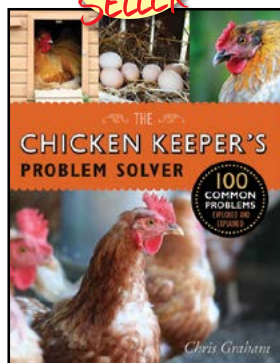
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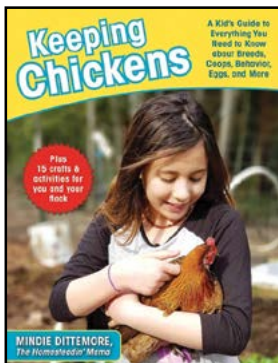
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### KEEPING CHICKENS: A KID'S GUIDE

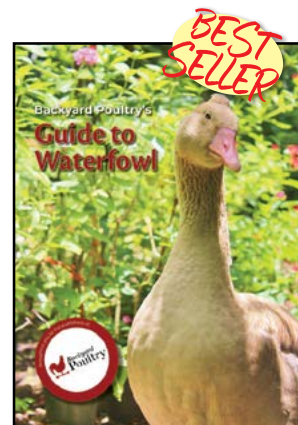
Whether you have chickens already or are just thinking of starting your own flock, this book is packed full of valuable information that will help you raise and maintain a happy, healthy flock. Not only will you learn the basics, like how to pick the right breeds and how to house, feed, and care for your birds, but you will also find craft, gardening, and DIY projects that will make taking care of your flock fun and entertaining!

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### BACKYARD POULTRY'S GUIDE TO WATERFOWL

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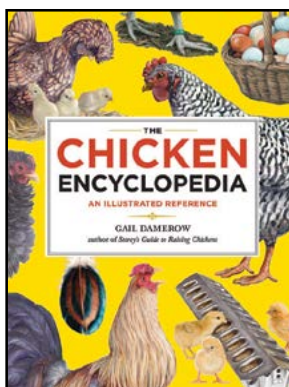
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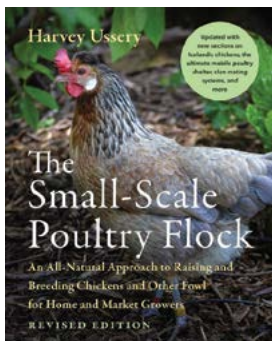
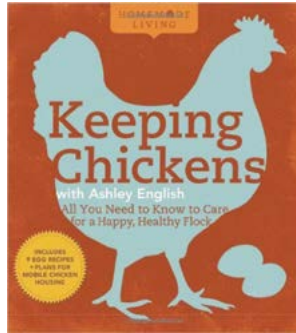
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## KEEPING CHICKENS: ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW TO CARE FOR A HAPPY, HEALTHY FLOCK

For anyone ready to put their eggs in this basket, here is the perfect guide to raising chickens, with information on choosing a breed, acquiring the chicks, and housing, feeding, and caring for them. Plus, it provides the lowdown on eggs, including "egg"-cellent recipes and profiles of people who have taken on the chicken-rearing challenge. This book includes two projects with exploded woodworking illustrations and photos: a simple nesting box and a wildly creative mobile chicken tractor.

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## THE SMALL-SCALE POULTRY FLOCK, REVISED EDITION

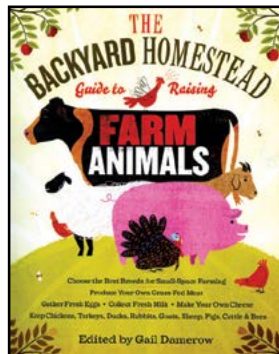
Author Harvey Ussery introduces readers to his new favorite breed of chicken, Icelandics; describes how he manages his breeding flock using a clan mating system; presents detailed information on the use of trap nests and record-keeping spreadsheets for evaluating breeding hen performance, and provides step-by-step instructions for construction of an ingeniously designed mobile poultry shelter.

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## THE BACKYARD HOMESTEAD: GUIDE TO RAISING FARM ANIMALS

Enjoy a weekend breakfast featuring eggs, bacon, and honey from your own chickens, pigs, and bees, or a holiday meal with your own heritage-breed turkey as the main attraction. Gail Damerow covers everything you need to successfully raise your own farm animals, from selecting the right breeds to producing delicious fresh milk, cheese, honey, eggs, and meat. Even with just a small plot of land, you can become more self-sufficient, save money, and enjoy healthy, delicious animal products.

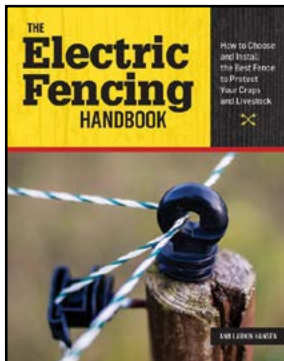
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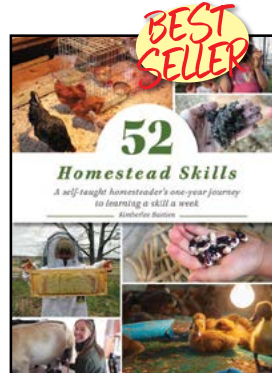
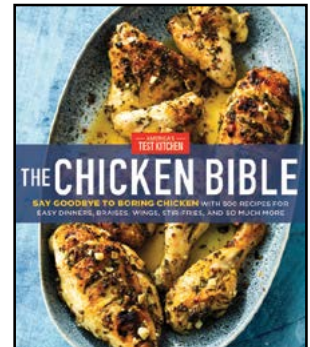
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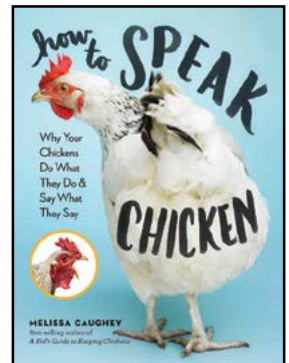
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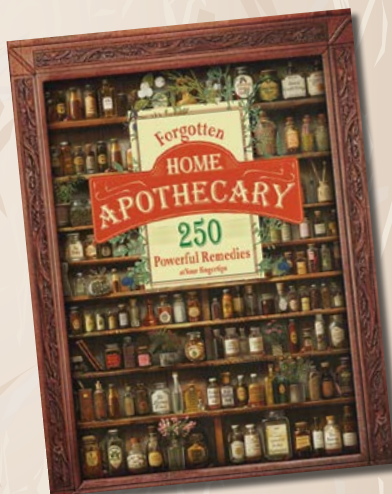
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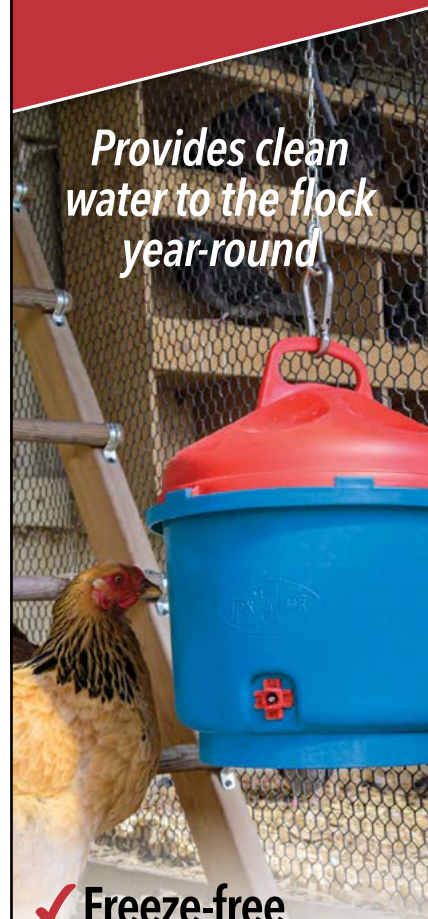
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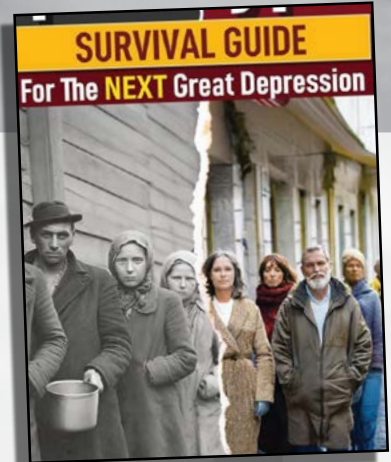
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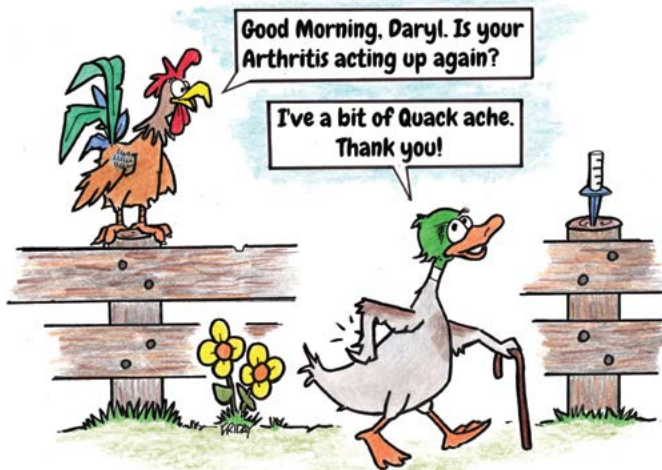


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 H C C B Q M V M J L V H Q Y E X W W X B F C I M  
 W H M C T E I E J I B A M Q Z C W I K Y E P I N  
 C R S A Y D G W R X S E H O S Q A W P D V V Q D  
 N I N K G X M E P J N A Y T N T A R X V K S Q O  
 D S R P X H R N E O E T N B N N L T O M F I B A  
 D T Z B U S L D R N I E C T Z C U E Z L D N U Z  
 M M Y D Y E G A X N M A H A A O Y G G G S Q B A  
 Z A K K S L H O U A N Z A B A C W L G N C M R M  
 X S L N I D Y U N D P D A D K R L U H C A J W D  
 S T I H P N W R Y G Z R V W F C S A G H K O I C  
 G T V X U A O C X V G E B X O B K Q U E V L M J  
 B G I Y N C A O C V N E K O V K U A J S C I Q G  
 I X K L M N S M S T W L J H U L E D I E R D N A  
 U H O I E I W J J C J I X N Y J P W T L N R S P  
 V W T W N W A V C X D G A H W T H O O A X J H K  
 O S M L Y A V Y I D E H A M Z A O J P I Q X G V  
 I K F F R Y R N T K Y T E L G N I R K S I R K B  
 S I S S V A S A U G B S L P O X O P C F J A Y B  
 E S D Y P V Z E Q A Y L L O H R G J O V R L I Q  
 Q H M A N A T I V I T Y Z X T H O Y W C I M H N  
 L I N G W T J G S N T H Q L T X H T M M Q A U K  
 P V V F A A I T A P S F E Q L J T X A B O N O X  
 W R E A T H Z R I Y S G X S S O Q F J K F B W R

Advent  
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 Candy cane  
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 Christmas  
 Dreidel  
 Eggnog  
 Family  
 Gelt  
 Hanukkah  
 Holly  
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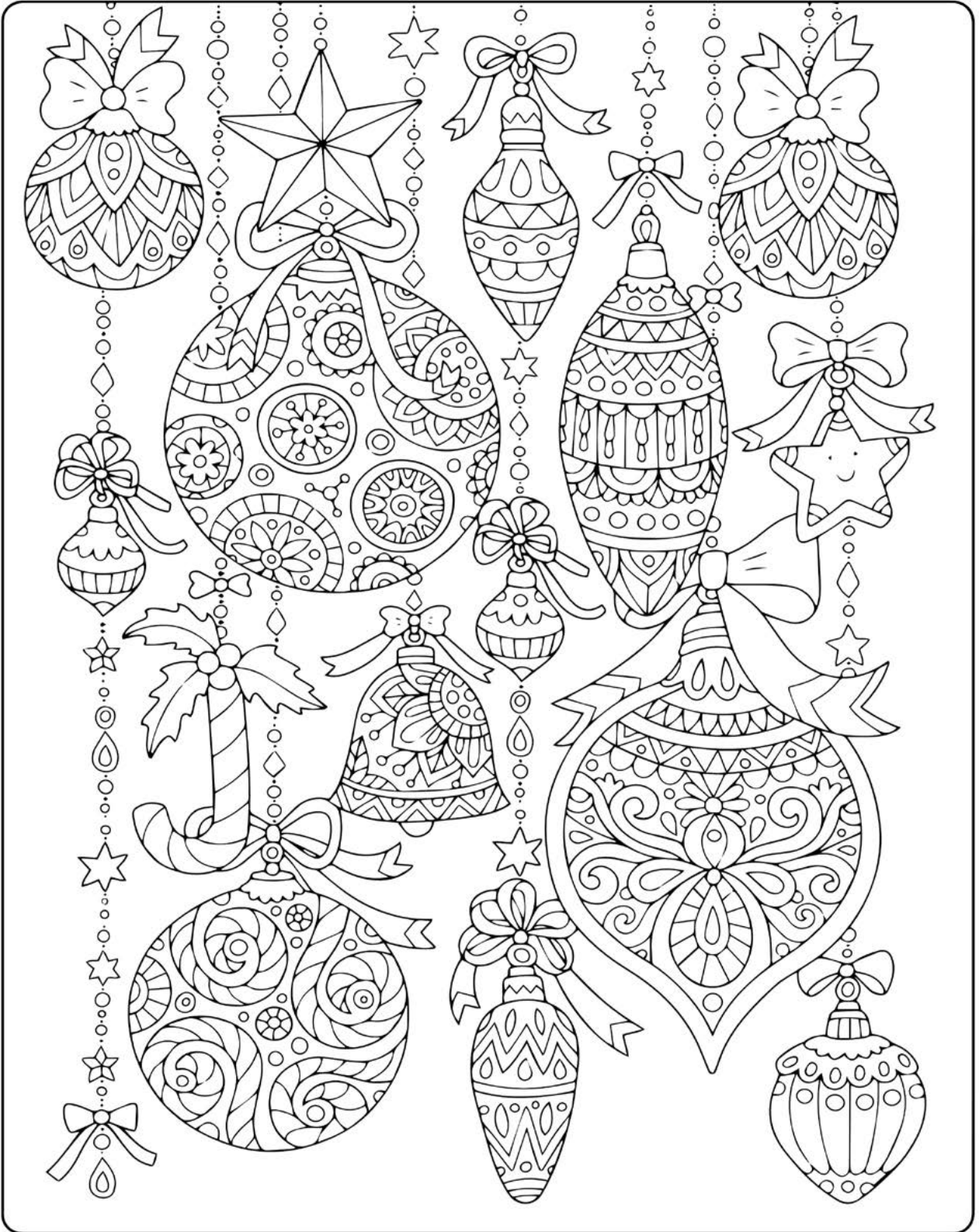


### Answer Key

W R E A T H Z R I Y S G X S S O Q F J K F B W R  
 H O L L Y I D E A L S  
 C A N D Y C A N E  
 K R I S K R I N G L E  
 K W A N Z A A  
 L I G H T S  
 M A Z A O  
 M E N O R A H  
 N A T I V I T Y  
 O R N A M E N T S  
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12

1. Annabelle Bates; 2. Francesca Jones, age 6; 3. Harper Mattmuller;  
4. Jackson Rice, age 5; 5. Lester Parks, age 91; 6. Jemma Strehlow;  
7. Oscar Kizlinski, age 9; 8. Shepherd Cecil, age 9; 9. Shepherd Cecil, age 9;  
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