

## Exhibition Poultry

Exhibition poultry are birds raised and kept for show purposes. They are birds recognized by the American Poultry Association in their *American Standard of Perfection* and by the American Bantam Association in their *Standard*. Poultry shows offer a great opportunity to meet exhibitors, breeders, judges, and see a wide variety of birds. Many poultry shows offer showmanship for youth exhibitors.

### Finding Shows

Begin show preparation by deciding what shows you want to attend within a particular time frame. Find shows that fit into you and your family's schedule by looking for poultry shows on the Internet, contacting poultry associations, or talking with breeders. The Poultry Show Central website, [www.poultryshowcentral.com](http://www.poultryshowcentral.com), is the go-to Internet site to find show poultry information. Record the location and dates on a calendar. Download or obtain a copy of the premium list (show bill) for each show as soon as it is available. Note whether the shows use the APA or ABA breed Standard, and follow that breed standard for the birds you plan to show (ABA is for bantams only). The premium list will tell you the date, location, when the birds must be cooped in and are released, the entry deadline and entry fees, classes available, health requirements, acceptable methods for identifying birds, if youth showmanship is offered, awards being offered, and show officials contact information.

### Selecting Poultry for Show

People who show poultry are called fanciers. If you are interested in showing poultry, you first must select a quality bird. Typically, you will not find show quality birds at hatcheries; therefore, talk with breeders and attend poultry shows to find quality show birds. Once you have birds, be prepared to put a lot of work into caring for these birds, and conditioning and training them. Even though you might not show poultry year round, keeping quality show birds is a year round responsibility.

Beginners, especially, should specialize in one breed and one variety within that breed. There are so many breeds and varieties of poultry that it is easy to get carried away by purchasing several different breeds and showing a lot of birds. Exhibitors who consistently win will tell you that showing birds starts in the breeding pen. They have an extensive knowledge of the breeds and varieties they are showing, have a well-planned out breeding program, and cull any birds that do not meet the show qualifications outlined in the APA and ABA Standards.

Bantam chickens and ducks outnumber large fowl at most shows. They are a good choice for beginners as they take less space to house, are cheaper to feed, easier to manage, and can be transported in the family vehicle. Bantams are also easier than large fowl for youth to handle.



Purchasing an APA *American Standard of Perfection* is a must for people who want to show poultry. The *Standard* establishes a scale of points that assigns a value to every feature of a bird. These features and point systems vary according to each species - chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, and guinea fowl. For example, there is no such thing as the perfect chicken, but if there were, that bird would score 100 points. Judges deduct points, called cutting for defects, from the 100-point scale, according to the severity of a defect. If the defect is serious, it becomes a disqualification, and the bird is ineligible to win an award. The APA *Standard* lists general disqualifications that apply to all breeds and varieties, as well as disqualifications specific to certain breeds and varieties. General disqualifications for all breeds and varieties include (1) specimen lacking breed characteristics (weight, shape, color); (2) definite indications of contagious or communicable diseases; and (3) evidence of faking. Faking is the deliberate attempt to remove or conceal a disqualification or serious defect, making a bird look like something it is not, to deceive a judge or prospective buyer. It is dishonest and unethical under any circumstances.

Eight weeks prior to the first show, select the birds you plan to show, plus a few extra. That way you will have replacements if one or two do not work out. Refer to the APA *American Standard of Perfection* or the ABA *Standard* to select birds based on their symmetry, weight or size, shape and type, color, feather quality and condition. Selecting the birds early allows time to improve their condition and feather quality. Select birds with the fewest defects and with no disqualifications. If showing pullets or cockerels (poultry less than one year old), select birds that are fully feathered.

### **Housing**

Treat each selected bird for lice infestation. Then put your prospective show birds in individual pens to prevent pecking from other birds and their feathers being damaged. Individual wire pens or cages with solid bottoms large enough for your birds to stand tall and spread their wings can be used for housing. Some people purchase show coops for training purposes. Being penned in show coops also orients birds to the types of coops they will be housed in during a show.

Bed each pen with pine shavings. Do not use a form of bedding that is dusty and non-absorbent. Keep the pens clean at all times so the birds do not get their feathers stained. Every time you feed or check on your birds, remove any droppings and add more shavings if needed. Some people line the bottom of the pens or coops with vinyl flooring for ease of cleaning.

Once you have placed each bird in its pen, put an identifying leg band on each bird, if it is not already identified. Inspect each bird and make notes on its condition, any broken, damaged or off-colored feathers, scratched combs, etc. Feathers typically grow back in six to eight weeks, so if you find one or two damaged, broken, or stained feathers, gently pull them out and they should grow new feathers in time for the show. Never yank out a wing or tail feather as you might damage the feather follicle. Cut the feather leaving a two-inch stub. Then cut the shaft down the middle toward the skin. Once the feather loosens, gently pull it out. If a bird has several damaged or stained feathers, return it to the flock and wait on it to molt. Do not attempt to remove several feathers.

## **Conditioning**

Condition refers to the state of a fowl in regard to health, including cleanliness and brightness of plumage, head parts, legs, and feet. Therefore, conditioning is the process of achieving that state of good health and cleanliness. Conditioning includes nutrition and grooming.

### **Nutrition**

Check the *Standard* to see what the ideal weights are for your birds. Weigh each bird and record the date and weight. If a bird is overweight, slightly reduce the amount of food intake and increase exercise. Swimming is the best form of exercise for waterfowl. If a bird is underweight, increase its food intake. If it does not gain weight, look for the cause.

Feed your birds a balanced waterfowl, chicken, or game bird feed. Offer whole oats free choice in a separate feeder from the poultry feed. Whole oats improve feather quality. Provide granite grit to help the birds digest the oats. Also feed a small amount of black-oil sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, flax, or linseed meal to promote natural oil production, enhancing the sheen of the plumage.

Experienced exhibitors typically have a diet they customize for their show birds. Talk with exhibitors to see what works for their breeds and varieties of poultry.

### **Grooming**

If showing chickens, initially bathe each of them. Refer to the Bathing and Grooming Section for bathing instructions. Then don't bathe them again until four or five days prior to the show. This allows enough time for natural oils to return to their feathers. Waterfowl need to swim every day to help grow shiny, clean feathers. Bathing is the best conditioner for waterfowl feathers. Change the water daily since stale and dirty water will stain the waterfowls' feathers, as well as cause the bird to become sick.

## **Transporting Show Birds**

Exhibition poultry are taken to shows in many types of cages or carriers. Some people use wooden or plastic carriers made especially to transport poultry. Plastic dog crates and well-ventilated plastic tubs can also be used. Even sturdy cardboard boxes with holes to ensure adequate ventilation work for short distances.

Make sure the carrier is large enough for your bird to stand up, move around, and not damage its feathers. Line the bottom of wooden carriers with vinyl to keep droppings from soaking into the wood, and for easier cleaning. Bed the carrier floor with shavings. Make sure it does not have any sharp edges on the inside for your bird to injure itself.

If transporting more than one bird in a carrier, or a compartment within a carrier, make sure they get along. You don't want them to pick at each other or fight, which could damage their combs or feathers.

It is fine to put feed in the carrier during transport, but do not leave water in the carrier. Chances are it will spill, which could cause the cage and your bird to get wet. Stop every four hours or so to water your birds if you are traveling a long distance.

Never leave your birds inside a vehicle when it is hot outside. Also, make sure your birds are protected from drafts, rain and cold during transport.

## **Sale Birds**

Most shows have an area where people can sell their poultry. Either the owner is present or leaves a name and phone number on the cages so prospective buyers can find him/her. Many sale birds are high quality animals, but some are not. These birds may have not been health-checked and may not be in show condition.

Before buying sale birds, ask a knowledgeable exhibitor or breeder to look at the birds with you to see if they meet breeding or show standards. If purchasing any birds, spray them for external parasites before taking them home. Do not put them in the same carriers as your other birds. When you get them home, quarantine them for a minimum of fourteen days, before adding them to your flock.

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Sources: *Exhibition: From Selection & Conditioning to Show Floor*, Patty Pickard  
*Standard of Perfection*, American Poultry Association, 2015  
*Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens*, Gail Damerow, 2010