

Feeding Geese

 articles.extension.org/pages/67812/feeding-geese

Written by: *Dr. Jacquie Jacob, University of Kentucky*

The digestive tract of the goose is similar to that of any other poultry species, but it has some adaptations that enable geese to digest large amounts of high-fiber feedstuffs. Ingested feed passes quickly from the crop to the large, muscular proventriculus (similar to a human stomach) and then to the well-musclcd gizzard. The gizzard of a goose uses higher pressures for grinding food than that of a chicken or duck. The large proventriculus and gizzard cause feed particles to release cell sap and crush the cells of feed particles so that ingested feed is more accessible to digestive enzymes and microbial breakdown in the goose's well-developed cecum and large intestine. As a result, fiber digestion is relatively efficient despite the fact that feedstuffs pass through the digestive tract quickly. Grit is required to assist with digestion, although geese can typically ingest enough grit from small pebbles in the pasture.

Geese are excellent foragers. While goslings should be started on a complete feed, grass can be added to the diet by two months of age. By four months of age, geese can survive on plenty of good quality pasture. Geese cannot be raised on dried out, mature pastures. When the quality of the pasture is low, a supplemental feed may need to be provided. If geese are destined for the table, a finisher feed can be used to fatten them. Because female geese will not be able to forage for food while incubating eggs, female geese kept as breeders should receive a breeder feed while sitting on eggs.

Depending on the quality of pasture and the breed of goose, one acre can support 20 to 40 geese. Geese are very selective, passing up alfalfa and narrow-leaved tough grasses for more succulent clovers, bluegrass, orchard grass, timothy, and brome grass. The selectivity that geese display makes them suitable for biological control of weeds in a number of different crops. Geese have been used to weed such crops as cotton, tobacco, asparagus, fruit shrubs, nut trees, grapes, fruit trees, beets, sugar beets, beans, hops, onions, strawberries, and various ornamental flowers. The number of geese needed to weed an acre depends on the level of weed growth and the crop in question.

There are very few feed stores that carry feeds formulated specifically for geese. Goslings can be started on a chick starter. After two to three weeks, goslings can be fed a pelleted chick grower supplemented with cracked grains. Feeds should be unmedicated. Certain coccidiostats used in chick starters and growing diets may cause lameness or even death among goslings.

For More Information

Raising geese. Melvin Hamre, University of Minnesota.

Weeding with geese. Glenn Geiger and Harold Biellier, University of Missouri.