

# Interactions of Chickens in Small and Backyard Poultry Flocks with Other Species

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Chickens can be kept with some animals but not others. To determine whether to raise another animal along with your small poultry flock, you need to know whether the other animal and your chickens will get along with each other, whether they will pass diseases to each other, whether they can be exposed safely to each other's feed, and whether the combination of animals is mutually beneficial or beneficial to your overall agriculture system. If you are considering keeping rabbits, guinea fowl, turkeys, emus, sheep, goats, cows, or pigs with your chickens, the information that follows will help you make your decision.

Chickens and **rabbits** have several diseases in common. For example, often *Pasteurella multocida* is endemic in rabbit colonies. An infection of *P. multocida* can be a problem in rabbit production and is associated with respiratory symptoms that are commonly referred to as "snuffles." *P. multocida* infection of chickens can result in an outbreak of fowl cholera. Also, there is a chicken cholera that rabbits can contract.

Typically, chickens and **guinea fowl** do not interact much and get along well, but there have been incidences of guinea males attacking roosters. Because guineas have a loud warning call, people sometimes keep guineas with chickens to act as a sort of alarm system to warn the flock of predators in the air. The risk of spreading disease is always an issue, however, when different species of poultry are raised together.

It is not recommended that chickens and **turkeys** be kept together. Without exhibiting any outward signs of illness, chickens can carry the parasite that causes blackhead, a disease that adversely affects turkeys.

Usually, chickens and **emus** can get along if they are raised together or slowly introduced to each other. If they are not introduced correctly, however, the much larger emus may see the chickens as a threat and attack them.

Chickens and **sheep** typically get along. They simply ignore each other, although chickens sometimes perch on top of sheep and try to scratch through their wool. Lambs are sometimes curious about chickens and may try to chase or butt them, but this behavior usually is not a problem unless the chickens are cornered. It is important, however, to check the feed tags when raising chickens and sheep together. Some poultry feeds include copper, which sheep are sensitive to. If such feeds are being given to chickens, it is important that they not be available to the sheep.

It is not recommended to keep chickens and **goats** together. Chickens and goats share a few diseases, but the main one of concern is cryptosporidiosis. Cryptosporidiosis is caused by cryptosporidia, which are small parasites of the intestinal tracts of fishes, reptiles, birds, and mammals. There are several species of cryptosporidia, and they are not host specific, meaning that they can be transferred from one host species to another.

Chickens learn to stay away from **cows** to avoid being trampled. There is a benefit to keeping chickens and cows together or to allowing chickens to forage on pastures previously used by cows. The chickens will eat any feed that the cows have dropped and will peck through cow manure looking for larvae. A cattle-chicken rotational system is good for reducing fly problems.

It is not recommended that you raise chickens and **pigs** together. Pigs have been known to kill and eat chickens that wander into their pens.