

# Selecting and Preparing Poultry for Exhibition

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*Growing, selecting and preparing exhibition poultry for show is a good way to learn animal husbandry. The project provides an opportunity to learn responsibility, decision making and showmanship skills.*

*A poultry project generally requires less space and less monetary investment than other animal projects. A project that uses meat-type production birds can take only 8 weeks to complete. Birds are easy to handle, the facilities are normally inexpensive and the impact on the environment is minimal.*

But ordering a few chicks and raising them for the show doesn't guarantee a winning entry. Time spent reading or visiting with experienced exhibitors will benefit the exhibitor. Youth who are interested in exhibiting poultry should join a local poultry club.

## **Selecting and Entering Birds in the Show**

Select birds in advance of the show (at least 2 weeks). This will allow time to discover disqualifications and defects, and the birds can be observed for signs of disease.

Observe the flock when it is congregated in the poultry house or yard and make a tentative selection of several birds. Choose about three times as many birds as you intend to enter. If you take time to cull your flock, your cost to maintain your project will be reduced.

## **Classes of Poultry**

Most shows such as at county and state fairs will have two broad divisions. Birds entered in the wrong class may be disqualified, so seek advice from your county agent or extension specialist if you are not sure about the classification.

## **Production**

Enter birds in this classification if their primary pur-

pose is for egg or meat production.

**Egg-type and dual-purpose birds** should be exhibited only as trios of pullets or hens. Meat-type (broilers, roasters, capons) birds should be exhibited as trios of either sex, and not mixed—judging is on their production qualities only.

**For egg production classes**, select three birds that are as uniform as possible and matched with respect to size, head type, plumage color, shank color and state of maturity. Select birds of good production type, of normal size, well-feathered, free of serious physical defects (crooked keels), vigorous, healthy and alert. When selecting pullets, choose those birds that show characteristic femininity and refinement, and sexual maturity as indicated by enlargement and redness of the comb and wattles. Pullets should be free of signs of old age. Ideally, pullets should be near or in the early stages of egg production. Select hens that show superior present and past egg production as indicated by the condition of their comb, wattles, eyes, pubic bones, abdomen and vent, degree of bleaching and status of molt.

**For meat production**, select birds that are as uniform as possible in size, body conformation, fleshing and finish

(fat covering). Select birds that are well-feathered and free from defects, such as breast blisters and callouses, curved and crooked breast bones, bruises, cuts and tears and hunched backs. Fleshing and finish develop with age, so older birds will have more desirable meat qualities than younger birds. Breast meat quantity is very important in this class.

Any bird entered in the meat-type division should be a Cornish-cross type bird.

### ***Exhibition Division***

Standard bred (normal size) and bantam breeds of chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys should be entered in the young and old classes of exhibition poultry.

Chickens are classified by age as follows: **cock and hen**—birds hatched prior to the current calendar year; **cockerel and pullets**—birds hatched during the current calendar year. These birds should be purebreds that have been selected for exhibition qualities. Exhibition birds are usually exhibited as a single male or female.

Information on the breed characteristics of purebred chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys is available in the "American Standard of Perfection," American Poultry Association, 133 Millville Street, Mendon, MA 01756. "The Bantam Standard," American Bantam Association, Box 127, Augusta, NJ 07822, describes the breeder characteristics of bantam breeds.

Anyone considering showing in the exhibition classes should purchase a copy of this publication. Each breed is listed along with necessary characteristics and

a list of disqualifications.

When selecting parent stock to be used for breeders, these publications are essential.

Exhibition birds should have the best body type for the breed, be uniform in color, have well-developed bodies, well-developed but not worn or ragged feathers, be healthy and free from physical defects, have the correct breed characteristics and be free from disqualifications. Body weight is of particular importance.

A disqualification is a physical defect that bars a bird from being considered for an award.

Common, general disqualifications are:

1. Crooked or crossed beak; crooked breast bone, legs or seriously crooked toes; roached or deformed back.
2. Side sprigs (extra points) on comb; split (divided) comb; comb foreign to the breed.
3. Positive enamel white in the earlobe of breeds in the American and English classes. Exceptions are the Lamona, Holand, Dorking and Redcap breeds.
4. Red color in more than one-third of the earlobe of cockerels and pullets in the Mediterranean class (two-thirds in Buttercup breed).
5. Positive enamel white in the face of cockerels and pullets (except White-Faced Black Spanish).
6. Any entirely white feathers showing in outer plumage of varieties with red-colored feathers.
7. Red or yellow color in feathers of varieties with barred, black, or mottled feather colors.
8. Any foreign color in white-feathered birds (except slight gray ticking).
9. Two or more solid black

primaries, secondaries, or main tail feathers in Barred Plymouth Rocks.

10. Stubs (small feathers) on legs or between toes of other than Asiatic breeds.
11. Shanks, feet or toes of a color foreign to the breed.
12. Wry tail (off to one side) and a split wing.

### ***Grooming Birds for Show***

A poultry exhibit should be clean. Dirty birds are a reflection on the exhibitor and may be discriminated against during judging. A soiled bird indicates that the owner spent little time on the project. Never show a bird that is infected with mites or other external parasites. The feet and shanks (legs) of all birds should be washed in warm water. (Use brush and soap or detergent). After drying, rub petroleum jelly on beak, comb and shanks. This will help them stay clean until show time as well as improve their appearance.

If feathers are soiled, wash them (at least three days ahead of time) as follows:

1. Use a warm room free of drafts with the temperature about 70°F.
2. Use a tub of lukewarm water and a mild shampoo.
3. Sponge the feathers clean, being careful to wash in the direction that the feathers lay so as not to ruffle or disturb their appearance.
4. Rinse once or more as necessary with lukewarm water, a small amount of Downey and white vinegar to remove soap.
5. Press dry with a towel. Do not rub.
6. Place the bird in a clean coop with plenty of straw or other litter and do not remove from the warm room until the bird is dry.

Some of the material used in this publication was taken from "A 4-H Guide in Selecting and Preparing Birds for Show," by Phillip E. Plumart, South Dakota State University.

**Resources:**

Kansas State Poultry Club  
Milton & Valerie Gadberry  
944 S. Sherman  
Hutchinson, KS 67501  
(316) 669-7854

American Poultry Association  
133 Millville Street  
Mendon, MA 01756

American Bantam Association  
Box 127  
Augusta, NJ 07822

Kansas Poultry Association  
c/o Scott Beyer  
Kansas State University  
130 Call Hall  
Manhattan, KS 66506-1600

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