

Choosing a Chicken Breed: Eggs, Meat, or Exhibition

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There are many reasons for raising chickens. People raise chickens for eggs, meat, exhibition, and rare breed preservation, as well as for the enjoyment of raising, caring for, and watching their interesting behavior. Some people raise them to hear a rooster crow to symbolize past days on the farm.

There is a wide array of chicken breeds. Choosing the right type of chicken can be difficult. The purpose of this publication is to help beginners determine which types of chickens are most suited to their needs.

Egg production. White Leghorns (pronounced leggers) are prolific layers of white eggs. Golden Comets and Red Sex Links are excellent layers of brown eggs. In general, chicken breeds with white ear lobes lay white eggs, whereas chickens with red ear lobes lay brown eggs.

Eggs and meat. Dual purpose breeds include several American and English breeds such as Plymouth Rocks, Sussex, and Wyandottes. These breeds lay reasonably well and are large enough for meat production.

Meat. For meat production only, nothing compares with the fast growth of Cornish Cross (White Cornish x White Plymouth Rock). They reach 4-5 lbs in 6 weeks and 6-10 lbs in 8-12 weeks.

Exhibition. Exhibition poultry shows are popular in Indiana and the Midwest. The American Poultry Association (APA) publishes, *The American Standard of Perfection*. This illustrated book gives a complete description of all recognized breeds and varieties of domestic poultry. Chickens are judged according to those descriptions of ideal breed type, color, weight,

and other characteristics for the particular breed and variety.

Bantams, in most cases, outnumber large fowl at poultry shows. Bantams are 1/4 or less the size of large fowl. They are easier for young 4-H members to handle, eat less feed and take up less space than large fowl. Although smaller, their eggs are just as good to eat as large chicken eggs. Some of the most popular exhibition bantam breeds are Old English Game, Cochins, Plymouth Rocks, and Wyandottes.

Some of the most popular large fowl breeds in the showroom are Rhode Island Reds, Plymouth Rocks, Black Australorps, and Leghorns. A tremendous variety of other breeds is also available. They vary in type, size, color, shape, comb type and other attributes. Exhibition large fowl breeds are divided into classes generally based on their origin (see Table 1).

American breeds were developed for dual purpose use on farms. These include the Plymouth Rock, Rhode Island Red, New Hampshire, Wyandotte, and others. Asiatic breeds are characterized by their massive size and feathered feet. They include the Brahma, Cochin, and Langshan. English breeds are characterized by their dual purpose use and white skin. They include Orpington, Sussex, Australorp, and Cornish. Continental breeds are characterized by their European origins, active flighty dispositions, and ornamental characteristics. These include the crested Polish, colorful Hamburgs, and bearded Faverolles.

Mediterranean breeds are characterized by their active flighty dispositions, laying of white eggs, non-broodiness, and flying expertise. Examples are Leghorn, Ancona, and Minorca. The remainders of breeds are included in the Any Other Standard Breed

(AOSB) class. These include the long-tailed Sumatra and Phoenix, as well as the blue egg layers, the Araucana and Ameraucana.

Backyard chicken raising can be a satisfying hobby, whether raising the birds for eggs, meat, or exhibition. By knowing which types of chickens to raise for particular needs, you can save time, money, and increase your enjoyment of raising poultry.

Table 1. Exhibition large fowl breeds		
Breeds & (varieties)	Egg color	Characteristics & uses
American Class		
Dominique	Brown	First American breed; not common
Plymouth Rock (barred, white, buff, silver penciled, partridge, Columbian, blue)	Brown	Typically docile; fairly good dual-purpose breed; whites and barred are popular exhibition varieties at shows
Wyandotte (silver-laced, golden-laced, white, black, buff, partridge, silver penciled, Columbian, blue)	Brown	Typically docile; whites and silver-laced are most common exhibition varieties; popular at shows; good dual-purpose breed
Rhode Island Red (single-comb, rose-comb)	Brown	Also popular in exhibition; production-bred strains lay very well
Jersey Giant (black, white, blue)	Brown	Massive body; largest breed of chicken; can be used for meat
New Hampshire	Brown	Developed from Rhode Island Reds; bred for quick maturing and proficient laying
Asiatic Class		
Brahma (light, dark, buff)	Brown	Large-bodied bird; feathered legs; docile; slow-maturing; can be used for meat
Cochin (buff, partridge, white, black, silver-laced, golden-laced, blue, brown, barred)	Brown	Large body; feathered legs; very profuse, soft feathering; docile; round body shape
Langshan (black, white, blue)	Brown, often dark	Very tall stance; long legs and tail with characteristic U-shaped backline
English Class		
Dorking (white, silver-gray, colored, red)	White	Very ancient breed; 5 toes; short legs give a “dumpy” appearance
Cornish (dark, white, white-laced red, buff)	Brown	Very broad, meaty body; crossed with White Rocks to make hybrid meat birds

Orpington (buff, black, white, blue)	Brown	Big-bodied; decent egg-layer; somewhat common in exhibition
Sussex (speckled, red, light)	Brown	Old breed; good dual-purpose breed; speckled is most common variety
Australorp (black)	Brown	Derived from Black Orpington; bred for egg-laying; very proficient layer
Mediterranean Class		
Leghorn (SC dark brown, light brown, white, buff, black, silver, red, black-tailed red, Columbian, golden duckwing, RC dark brown, light brown, white, buff, black, silver)	White	Very good layer of white eggs; production strains are basis of commercial egg industry; popular for exhibition; whites and light browns are most common; typically flighty
Minorca (SC black, white, buff, RC black, white)	White	Largest Mediterranean breed; good layers
Andalusian (blue)	White	Original blue-colored fowl; good layers
Ancona (single-comb, rose-comb)	White	Plumage is black with white tips; good layers; fairly rare
Continental Class		
Hamburg (golden-spangled, silver-spangled, golden-penciled, silver-penciled, white, black)	White	Old breed; somewhat active and flighty; silver-spangled and blacks are bred to high state of perfection; originated in Holland
Welsummer	Very dark brown	Primary use is a layer of chocolate brown eggs; becoming more common; Dutch breed
Lakenvelder	White or tinted	Breed has white body and contrasting black head, neck and tail
Polish (non-bearded white-crested black, golden, silver, white, buff-laced, white-crested blue, black-crested white; Bearded golden, silver, white, buff-laced)	White	Ancient breed; primary use is exhibition; breed characteristic is large crest at top of the head; some varieties have muffs and a beard; many unique colors, the most prevalent being white-crested blacks and buff-laced
Houdan (mottled, white)	White	Old breed originating in France; 5 toes and crest with muffs and a beard; rare
Faverolle (salmon, white)	White or tinted	Typically bred for exhibition, but also dual-purpose; 5 toes; French

All Other Standard Breeds (AOSB) Class

Modern Game (black-breasted red, brown-red, golden duckwing, silver duckwing, birchen, red pyle, white, black, wheaten)	White or tinted	Strictly an exhibition breed; created from Old English Games for showing; long legs and body create a very tall appearance; cocks have to be dubbed for showing
Old English Game (black-breasted red, brown-red, golden duckwing, silver duckwing, red pyle, white, black, spangled, blue-breasted red, lemon-blue, blue golden duckwing, blue silver duckwing,	White or tinted	Very ancient breed; ancestors were used for cockfighting; now primarily used for exhibition purposes; Old English Game bantams are the most popular breed of chicken in the United States; cocks must be dubbed self blue, crele for showing
Sumatra (black, blue)	Tinted	Very ornamental breed w/black face, comb, and legs, multiple spurs, and extremely shiny black plumage; tail is held horizontally and has many feathers
Phoenix (silver, golden)	White to tinted	Old breed from Japan; chief characteristic is very long tail
Araucana (black, black-breasted red, golden duckwing, silver duckwing)	Blue	South American breed; tailless and ear-tufted; original blue egg laying breed
Ameraucana (black, blue, blue-wheaten, brown-red, buff, silver, wheaten, white)	Blue	Relatively new breed; birds have tails and beard and muffs; birds that lay pink, green, or olive eggs are not purebred Ameraucanas



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