

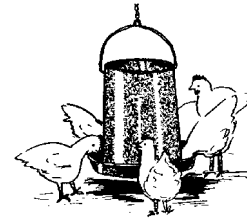


The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences / Athens, Georgia 30602-4356

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BACKYARD FLOCK TIP...

BREEDING AND EXHIBITING POULTRY A UNIQUE DIMENSION OF THE BACKYARD FLOCK

"This month's Backyard Flock Tip was contributed by Dr. James Harris, retired UGA Cooperative Extension Service administrator and long time producer and exhibitor of fancy Poultry".

Some of my very best memories include raising chickens as a 4-H Club member back during the forties and fifties. My Dad and I raised large fowl (standards), and we always had plenty of bantams running around. Springtime was my favorite season because our birds would start laying. We would set the eggs under mother hen, and I would get to play with all the multi-colored biddies. During the early fall when the county fairs were in operation, we would select our choice birds, wash and dry them, and take them to the fairs. I made enough money from the shows and from selling breeding stock to pay part of my college expenses.

After eight years of college and a wonderful thirty-year career with the University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension Service as a faculty member and administrator, I retired six years ago. Prior to retiring I searched for appropriate hobbies and past times that would provide me opportunity for focus, challenge, motivation, physical work, and most of all--fun. Raising and showing bantams along with stamp collecting were chosen.

I've had the "time of my life" with my chickens! I breed and show three different varieties/breeds. One is a feather-legged variety called the buff brahma. Another variety is the partridge wyandotte. And my third variety is the barred plymouth rock. The brahmas are the largest breed of bantams, and they have pea combs (three ridges and two valleys). The wyandotte is a "bird of curves" and has a beautiful rose comb. The barred rocks are single combed with points. My birds have done extremely well in major poultry shows throughout the Eastern part of the country. At the 1998 American Bantam Club National Show in Columbus, Ohio, my brahmas were judged to be the Champion Bantam Trio.

After the show season ends in late winter/early spring, I select my birds for the breeding pens, and I only breed pairs. This makes record keeping easier and the fertility rate is extremely high. I trim the

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

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feathers around the vents and dust them with 5% Sevin to prevent mites. I use a high protein breeder ration with vitamins added to the drinking water weekly and a wormer solution monthly. I collect eggs daily and keep them in a cool room. I turn them several times daily. I set them in my incubator each Sunday evening and place them in the hatching tray on the eighteenth day. On the twenty-first day, the eggs turn into the cutest chicks you've ever seen! I toe punch each bird so I can keep up with his ancestry. Into the brooder pen, they are fed with plenty of high protein growing ration and fresh water with vitamins added for the first few weeks.

Within a month, I put my young birds in dirt-floor pens. This helps them build immunity to chick diseases. Plenty of sunshine and a good sharp axe are necessary to breed healthy birds. I don't vaccinate my birds, and I don't tolerate sick birds. I try to breed for disease resistance. My birds are kept in covered wire pens and come into my chicken house at night. I dump all my lawn clippings into their pens. They love the fresh green grass, and it helps balance their diets. Scratching in the clippings is good exercise for them, too.

Some "culling" begins at hatch time (crooked feet, the wrong type of comb, weak birds, etc); however, I wait until the birds are four to five months old before I make my major selections. I give my "culls" away or sell them to people who just want pretty and healthy birds for a backyard flock or for pets. My show-quality bantams sell for fifteen to thirty dollars each.

My birds are at their peak for showing when the pullets begin laying (about five to six months of age) and when the cockerels are about eight to ten months old. To prepare my birds for show, I wash and dry them four days prior to the show. I transport them to the show in specially-designed carrying boxes with plenty of shavings. I arrive at the show the night before and clean up my birds. Shows begin at 9:00 AM; however, I arrive at 6:00 AM and do the final cleaning and greasing the legs, feet and combs. At show time, they are looking their best and are strutting for the judge. Only healthy birds which have been blood tested by a state official are allowed in the show area.

We "chicken people" are aligned in a very close-knitted fraternity; we are referred to as the "poultry fancy". We communicate by subscribing to and advertising in the Poultry Press and the Show Bird Journal. We hold membership in the American Bantam Club and the various breed clubs, i.e., American Brahma Club. Each of the breed clubs publishes monthly or quarterly newsletters. Our Junior Program is exemplary.

I now have a second career--I'm teaching four courses per semester in Piedmont College's Master's Degree Program for school teachers. But, I still schedule quality time for my chicken hobby. It helps me keep my head on straight and makes me a better spouse, father and granddaddy for four beautiful granddaughters. And when I get tired of chicken stuff, I come inside and work on my stamp collection. You are welcome to write me at 155 Green Hills Road, Athens, GA 30605 or email me at EmjimHar@AOL.Com.

Dr. James Harris retired from the Cooperative Extension Service in 1993. He is a long time producer and exhibitor of fancy poultry.



William C. Merka
Extension Poultry Scientist

County Extension Coordinator/Agent

Consult with your poultry company representative before making management changes.

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”