



Poultry
Showmanship
Made Easy



Getting Started

Choosing your bird - Before you buy a bird, you should ask yourself these four questions –

- *What kind of bird do you want?* You shouldn't just go around and snatch up the first bird you see! Even if it takes a while, it is best to choose a particular breed of chicken to look for.
- *How much are you willing to pay for a bird?* This is an extremely important question! Birds of good quality can cost up to \$75, although \$25 to \$50 is what most birds will cost.
- *Is the breed you have chosen suitable for your size and experience?* If you are a small child, you definitely don't want to carry around a ten pound Rhode Island Red. A small bantam is much easier to control and carry around for anyone.
- And last but not least, *do you have the kind of housing to keep your show bird clean and in good condition?* If your bird does not have a clean and well built pen, there is a good chance that you will have a dirty and sick bird by your first show.

Buying your bird - You should, if possible, look through the *American Standard of Perfection*, a book with all the breeds, varieties and classes that have

been accepted in the American Poultry Association, or APA, before buying your bird. As an example, I will tell you what I would do if there is a bird I would like to buy.

I am considering buying a bird. It is a hen. Her feathers seem to be in good condition, which means that they are not picked out or tattered. Her eyes are clear and she acts alert in her cage, not droopy or sleeping. I would next look in my Standard of Perfection for the description of her breed and variety. Her breed is Old English game bird, and her variety silver blue. The Standard says her feathers are to be a dark slaty blue, except on her neck, where they should be white with a lacing of black. Her feathers match this description. It also says however that her comb should be small, which hers is not. After looking at the rest of the description, that is the only physical problem with her. This is when I ask myself, is the defect serious enough for me to consider not buying her? After consulting a judge or poultry leader, I decided to buy the bird. Contacting the owner, I offered to buy the bird for the amount asked for. This is when most owners will ask questions such as where do you live, and what kind of housing do you have for your bird? You should also ask some questions about the bird, such as, how old is this bird? What is his/her show record? and have you ever shown this bird? After purchasing the bird, you should place it in the cage that you brought with food

and water. For a cage you can use anything from a box with lots of air holes in it to a cat carrier.

Care of your bird - Once you buy your bird, you need to keep it in top condition for showing. For bedding, straw or shavings are usually best. Make sure that you clean out the pen at least once every week. For feeders, a hanging metal feeder that is low to the ground usually works very well. Feeders that attach to the side of the cage are also commonly used, but are normally good only if you have one bird in the cage. Waterers can be anything from a metal pan to an automatic waterer, as long as it is off the ground and stays clean. If you live in a cold climate, however, the automatic waterers can freeze and break. The food you give your bird depends on its size and purpose. For a show bird, crumbles (a small kind of food in pellet type form) is the normal kind of food. You should also dust your bird regularly to prevent parasites. To dust your bird you should wear a dust mask, gloves, and old clothes. Use poultry dust, not cow or other livestock dust. Hold your bird at an arms length and sprinkle the powder on the bird. Rub it in to their feathers, and then release them. You will need to do this on a regular schedule of about once a month. You will also need to put some kind of de-wormer in either their water or food. Such wormers are available in feed stores. Use only poultry wormers and keep to a regular schedule

of about a month between each de-worming. Also stay on a regular schedule of trimming your bird's toenails and beak. This helps them to look far better at a show, as well as allow you to keep up with the growth of their toenails and beak on a regular basis, keeping them from getting overgrown. **DO NOT WASH YOUR BIRD ON A REGULAR BASIS!** This will cause the feathers to lose their natural shine, and they will not regain it until the bird molts again. Also, do not try to make your chicken have a forced molt. This causes undue stress on the bird, and, if anything, make them look better but act lethargic at the next show. If your chicken is a hen, make sure that you take out any or all eggs that she may lay. This prevents her from learning to eat her own eggs if you ever want to breed her.

Practicing with your Bird - If you have ever seen a professional poultry showman at work, they make showing their bird look very easy. However, for your bird to act that good in a show ring, you need to practice, practice, practice. The smaller and calmer your bird is, the easier time you'll have of it. You should first start by handling and talking to your bird a lot, as well as feeding it tidbits out of your hand. With roosters, you need to be careful with the last step, as they can get aggressive if they feel that they have an advantage over you. When you and your bird feel comfortable around each other,

you can start practicing holding and walking around with the bird the correct way, by placing your middle and fourth finger between the bird's legs. Using your first finger and pinkie, hold the bird's wings down. For carrying, put the bird's head under your arm. Although the chicken's head is supposed to come out at the back of your arm, most show birds are so small they don't fit. For practicing showmanship, you can go to your local 4-H office and ask for the current poultry 4-H showmanship manual.

Washing your bird – About five or six days before the show you should wash your bird. If done correctly this helps to give the bird an edge in competition. You should also have dusted the chicken for the show by this time, as the results are better if you dust about two weeks before the show. You first need to gather the materials that you will need for washing. These materials will be:

- 2 buckets (gallon size)
- 1 tablespoon of mild liquid soap
- 1 teaspoon of white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon of glycerin
- 3 to 4 towels
- Hairdryer
- Nail clippers
- Old toothbrush

The first thing to do is to prepare your area for the washing. Make sure it is either a warm day or you can keep the bird inside overnight. You can wash in many different places, most of which depend on the bird. For small bantams that are easier to control you can wash them in the bathtub. For larger birds like Rhode Island Reds or Leghorns, the garage or outside is a safer bet. Spread the towels out wherever you are planning on washing as well as where you are going to blow dry the bird. Save one towel to carry the chicken from the washing area to the drying station. Have a cage ready to put the chicken in when finished.

Washing Procedure

- The first step is to fill the first bucket with 90 to 95 degrees F water. You don't need to use a thermometer, but make sure that the water isn't hot enough to burn or cold enough to give the bird chills. Add the tablespoon of mild liquid soap. The reason you use the mild soap is because chickens get rash very easily.
- The second step is to fill the second bucket with 80 to 85 degrees F water. Again, you may guess at the temperature. Add the vinegar and glycerin. The vinegar helps to rinse out the soap from the

feathers, while the glycerin gives them an extra shine, especially on black birds. If you have a white bird, adding a teaspoon of bluing makes the bird whiter and more clean looking. Don't add any more than the teaspoon, otherwise you will get a bluish colored bird just in time for the show!

- The third step is to wash your bird in the bucket with the soap in it. Use the toothbrush to scrub their feet and legs. Make sure that the chickens head doesn't go underwater. You will be cleaning the head of the bird later on at the show, so don't worry about washing that part. Gently rinse under both wings and under all of his/her feathers. Be careful not to ruffle the feathers too much, as this can make them look tattered and unattractive.
- The fourth step is to rinse the chicken in the water containing the vinegar and glycerin. Swish them around in it, rinsing out all the soap. Again, make sure the bird's head does not get underwater, and do not to ruffle the feathers too much.
- The fifth step is to wrap the bird in a towel and take them to the blow drying station. Blow dry them until they are either completely dry or close to it. Have the blow dryer setting on low and hold it about eight inches away from the bird's body. This will take about 20 to 30 minutes.

- The sixth and last step is to clip the bird's toenails and beak if you have not already done so. To trim the toenails, hold the chicken tightly and, using a small pair of fingernail clippers, cut off any excess nail. Make sure that you don't cut past the small blood veins that each toenail contains. You can see where the vein is by holding the nail up to the light and looking for a small thin line in the middle. Leave at least a tenth of an inch after the end of the vein. If you do by accident cut it, use Blood Stop, a blood coagulant. Is very important to stop the bleeding, as a seemingly small amount of blood loss can be fatal to the chicken. For the beak, use a small nail file, and file the beak to the length that is needed. Check for the blood vein in the beak as well, and file carefully, feeding the bird small treats to keep it calm. Try to finish in a short time, as the longer you take, the more agitated the bird will get. This does not mean that you should hurry at the expense of the bird, just that you should try to finish in about 5 to 10 minutes.

At The Show

It is finally time to pack for the show. The materials you will need are:

A waterer – A metal dish or glass waterer are the most common kinds of waterers that you can find. They both work well and are not very expensive. You can find them at most feed stores.

A feeder – A feeder that can attach to the side of the cage is usually best. Do not use an unsecured trough feeder! Your bird can easily tip over this kind of feeder unless it is tied to the side of the cage.

Food - Bring your own food that you usually give the bird at home. Some shows provide food, but it is always best to bring the food that the bird is used to and you know is O.K.

Bedding – Check with the show officials to see if they provide bedding. If they don't, bring plenty of pine or cedar shavings as well as a garbage bag to put used bedding into.

Extra Equipment – Bring a dowel or pointer for use in the ring if you are doing showmanship. Also bring plenty of towels or baby wipes for a last minute clean-up, along with olive or mineral oil, and wire or string to secure the feeder and waterer.

You've finally made it to the show! Set up in the cage provided, or in the one you brought, the waterer, feeder and bedding. Make sure that your bird cannot tip over

either the water or food by securing it with the wire or string to the cage. Fill both completely and then put the chicken in. Don't worry if he/she doesn't eat or drink at first. Almost all birds get carsick, even if you are on a straight road, just like some people get sick on a windy road. Watch them for an hour or so. If they are not eating two hours later, the chances are that they are sick. You should immediately remove the bird from the show if this happens. If you aren't sure if the bird is all right, ask a judge if they think your bird is off color. This is one of the many reasons that you should observe the bird at home in its normal environment to see what they usually act like. Are they usually a bit slow? Do they normally act somewhat lethargic? If so, this may be normal behavior for your bird.

After your bird is set up in the cage, wash it's head and face with a damp towel or baby wipes. Make sure that you use warm water on the towel, as this is much more comfortable for the bird and helps to clean it better. Then put a little bit of the olive or mineral oil on a towel corner or on some Q-tips. Gently apply this to the chickens comb, wattles, and beak. Be careful when applying it to the beak, as you can plug up their nostrils with the oil. Clean the bird's feet and legs with a damp towel or baby wipe. Then rub oil onto the bird's legs and feet. This gives them an extra shine for the judge. Don't do these

persevere however, they will soon be strutting down the table with style.

Procedures

This next part will take you through showmanship step by step.

Introducing yourself – This is an optional step that some judges don't require. It is always good to learn it however, just in case you need to do it in the show ring. You should say your name, age, the 4-H club or FFA group you are in, the sex of your bird; hen (a female bird over 6 months old), cock (a male bird over 6 months old), pullet (a female bird under 6 months old), or cockerel (a male bird under 6 months old). Next say how old your bird is. Then tell the judge the class, breed, and variety that your bird is. An example of what I would say with this bird is; "Hello, my name is Emily Lane, I'm thirteen years old and from the Grass Valley Creek 4-H Club. My bird is a hen. She is approximately 2 ½ years old. Her class is game bird, her breed is modern game, and her variety is brown-red." Share any interesting history or facts about the breed/variety.

Examining the Bird

This step is one of the hardest in the entire showmanship procedure. It is based on simply remembering the steps and practicing with your bird.

- ✓ **Head** – Hold the bird's head up on your finger and look at it's eyes, beak, and comb. Then turn the chicken around and do the same thing on the opposite side. Don't just pretend to be examining the bird, as some judges will ask you questions about certain points on your chicken. The longer you take to start answering these questions, the more the judge will be determined that you don't know what you are doing. This goes for all of the steps of examination. After you are done with each step, look at the judge before going on to the next. Wait until they acknowledge you before going on.
- ✓ **Wings** – Fan the chicken's wings out by grasping the shoulder joint and gently pulling out the wing. Count the birds feathers on the wing, spreading them out so that the judge can see. Then lift the chickens wing up and blow on the feathers underneath. This is to show the judge that the bird does not have mites or lice. Turn the bird around and repeat the procedure on the other side.

things until right before judging, however, as the oil attracts dust to the bird.

SHOWMANSHIP

This next section is completely on showmanship. If you are planning on only exhibiting your bird, you only need the information up to this point to be successful.

Practice

The first and most important rule of showmanship is kindness to your bird. The more co-operative your chicken is, the better success you'll have in the ring. Start out with the same procedures you would use for an exhibit bird, by feeding them treats and tidbits out of your hand, to gain their trust. Then start practicing holding and walking correctly with your chicken. Both of these steps lead to having a calm and docile show bird. The next step is one of the more important ones, but it also takes a lot of patience. Place your bird down on a table and wait. After a few seconds the bird will try to walk away. Calmly pick them back up and place them in the same spot that they were in before they moved. Continue doing this for about 10 minutes, then reward the bird with a small treat. It will take about 2 weeks for them to stand still for the required 2 to 3 minutes that you will need in the show ring. Then start working on posing the bird according to their breed. There are two mains

kinds of poses; the pose for the fluffier breeds such as cochins and silkies; and the other pose is strictly for the upright birds like the modern game. The pose that is in-between these two is for old English and Japanese bantam types.

Silkie Pose – Fluff up the tail so that it looks as much like a fluffy ball as possible. Then perk the birds head up by holding a small piece of food between your fingers and slowly moving it up in front of the bird, so that they stretch their neck up after it. Set the body at a very slight angle for the finishing touch.

Modern Game Pose – Use the same technique as with the silkie pose to get the birds head up. Then place the body so that the chicken is nearly upright. Make sure the tail feathers are in good condition, as the judge looks at these very closely.

Old English Pose – Again, use the same idea for posturing the birds head. You want the body at a very slight angle, with the tail upright. Be careful about having the body at too much of an angle.

Walking – Walking your bird is another step that takes lots of patience. For this step, you will also need a dowel or pointer. Place your pointer right behind the birds legs and push very gently. At first the bird will have to be pushed along a little bit, or will walk very stiffly. If you

- ✓ **Undercolor** – Lift the feathers on the birds saddle or neck and blow under them. This is checking that the bird's undercolor, or the color of the feather shafts, is correct, as well as checking for mites or lice.
- ✓ **Width of Body** – Place your thumb and first finger around the widest part of the birds body, or right behind the wing or shoulder joints. Show the measurement to the judge.
- ✓ **Breast** – Flip the bird over and hold their back against your chest. Measure the length of his/her keel bone, sometimes called the breast bone, with your first finger and thumb. Show the measurement to the judge. This is also to check that the keel bone is straight and does not have any bumps on it.
- ✓ **Vent** – Lower the bird slightly so that the head is facing you. Part the fluff feathers and show the judge the vent, checking for mites and lice as you do so.
- ✓ **Depth of Abdomen** – Measure the number of fingers that you can fit between the end of the breast bone and the pubic bones, two small bones on either side of the vent that stick out. Show the measurement to the judge.

- ✓ **Width between Pubic Bones** – The main purpose of this step is to see how productive your hen is when it comes to laying. This may make it seem like an unnecessary step if you show a rooster, but you need to do it anyway. See how many fingers you can fit between the pubic bones and show the number to the judge.
- ✓ **Feet and Legs** – Turn the chicken so that the head is facing toward the judge. Then hold out the feet and legs of the bird and look them over, checking for dirt, scaly leg, bumble foot, and other diseases that might be present. Then slowly turn the chicken in a full circle, looking at the legs and feet all the time. As this is the last step, you need to wait patiently if you finish first, holding your bird and smiling.

Caging the Bird – This is one of the easiest steps. You need to walk over to a cage that the judge has pointed out, making sure that you always face the judge. Place your bird in the cage, pose them, and then shut the cage door. Wait with your hands behind your back until the judge nods or asks you remove your bird. Take the bird out of the cage and walk back to the table.

Walking the Bird – If you practice with your chicken on this as explained earlier, it is very easy. The two main things to remember are not to get upset with your bird and to listen very carefully to the judge when she instructs you on where to walk the chicken. To turn the chicken around, place the pointer at the bird's shoulder opposite the way you want them to turn, and push. For example, if you want them to turn right, push on their left shoulder.

NEVER TOUCH THE BIRD WITH YOUR HANDS!!!! All judges will take off points if you do. Remember to pose your bird before and after you walk it. Then pick your bird up and step back from the table. Never take your eyes off the judge, as they give or take away points depending on whether or not you are attentive.

Questions – Questions are usually only used as tiebreakers, but some judges will ask them to see how much you really know. For studying you should look at the back of your Standard of Perfection, where there are many common questions that you will be asked. Also study the kinds of chickens in each class, as many judges like to ask this question; “Name a breed of chicken in the _____ class.” Common kinds in each class are listed at the front of your Standard. Congratulations, you now have a good start in learning how to show poultry.

I have taught you how to prepare for and be successful in a poultry show. For additional information, go to your local 4-H office and ask for poultry showmanship manuals. I hope you show your bird and enjoy yourself.

