



Understanding Breeds of Chickens

Americans have always had the desire to raise chickens. No other form of livestock combines such a wide variety of colors, shapes, and sizes with low cost and space requirements and at the same time provides an interesting hobby while providing fresh and healthy food for the family.

There are two basic groups of chickens; large and bantam. Large breeds are generally classed by the country of their origin which includes England, Asia, America, the Orient, the Mediterranean region and Continental. Bantams are grouped by individual aspects such as feathering and the shape of their combs. Some are classified as game breeds; others are classified as ornamentals.

Egg Producing Breeds

Some Mediterranean breeds are known for superior egg producing qualities. Among those are the Leghorns. Good laying hens of any breed have similar characteristics such as smaller bodies than those chickens used for a dual purpose. They mature early and lay early but they also, especially the Leghorns, have a nervous disposition and are hard to manage. Among the American breeds that lay abundant and good quality eggs are the Rhode Island Reds. They have a more docile personality and are easier to manage although the cocks can be aggressive. English breeds include the Australorps and the Orpingtons. All chickens, including bantams, lay eggs, but if that is your primary reason for keeping chickens you may want to invest in a group specifically known for egg production.

Meat and Dual Purpose Chickens

If you want a good layer but also a chicken for meat there are a number of dual purpose breeds. Among these are the Plymouth Rock, the Wyandotte and the Sussex. Breeds better known for meat purposes due to the size of their bodies, are the Red Sex Link and the Black Sex Link. The Red Sex Link is a cross between a Leghorn hen and a Rhode Island Red rooster. The Black Sex Link is crossbred from a Barred Plymouth Rock hen and a Rhode Island Red cock. Bantams are generally not kept as meat chickens because of their small size.

Ornamental Breeds

If keeping chickens for fun is what you want then you might consider the ornamental breeds. The Necked Neck and the Frizzle chickens are the most eye catching if not necessarily the

most aesthetic. Necked Necks have feathers everywhere except their necks making it appear elongated. The curling feathers on a Frizzle chicken give it the appearance of just having a permanent wave. Other ornamentals include the Araucana because of ear 'tuffs' , their absence of a rump appearance, and the fact that they lay blue eggs. The Faverolle is a bearded, booted beauty with great personality. Almost all bantams can be kept for show and ornamentation even those classified as 'game' chickens.

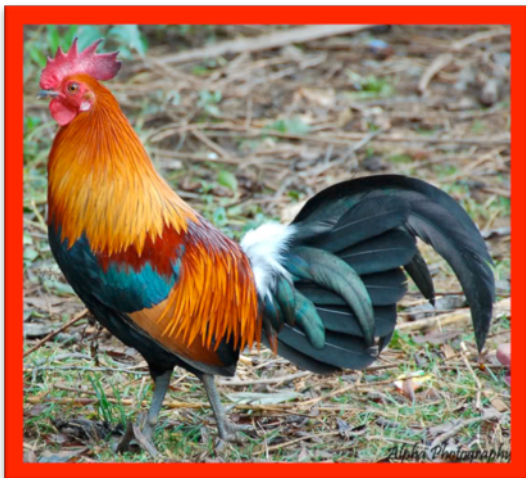
Endangered Breeds of Chickens

As with all domestic animal and fowl there are some breeds that, for various reasons, become less and less popular until they reach the endangered species list. If you wish to keep chickens in order to preserve a strain that might be lost to the world, then two North American breeds are worth your consideration. The Dominique, or Dominiker, is a beautifully barred chicken that claims the title of the first American breed. They were bred in the early 19th century and nearly became extinct until recent interest was sparked in preserving this dual purpose breed. The other is the Chantecler which is known as the oldest Canadian breed. It is rare to still find stock in these birds even in Canada. They, too, are dual purpose and were bred in the 20th century.

Chicken Terms

- **Hen:** a female chicken over one year
- **Cock:** a male chicken over one year
- **Pullet:** a female chicken under one year
- **Cockerel:** a male chicken under one year
- **Bantam:** a small miniature chicken
- **Large Fowl:** a standard size chicken

Red Jungle Fowl



Delaware (threatened breed)

