

# Raising backyard ducks

A reference guide to  
expanding your flock



FEED GREATNESS®



# Welcome to raising ducks.

If you're like us and have been raising backyard chickens for a few years, you may have ducks on your mind. Ducks can be a fun addition to any backyard flock.

Often recognized as the comedians of the poultry world, ducks are known for their quiet personalities and entertaining antics. You'll often see them patrolling the backyard for insects and weeds or playing in a grassy area with a large pond or pool.

Ducks can be raised with backyard chickens or separately. Like chickens, ducks are easy to raise. They reward great nutrition and care with healthy, nutritious eggs for your family.

Ready to dive into ducks? Print and keep this guide near your coop or duck house as a quick reference. Other resources available include [My First Year with Chickens](#) and [First Egg to Retirement](#). Be sure to download these guides, too.

If you have any questions, [connect with us online](#) or stop by your local [Purina® retailer](#). We're here with you each step of the way.

**Enjoy the journey!**  
**Your friends at Purina**





# Your quick guide to strong, healthy ducks

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## The basics:

Already part of the backyard poultry community? You likely know about all things chicken. Now it's time to take your flock to the next level and add ducks.

### Let's start with the basic terminology.

- A baby duck is called a duckling.
- A male duck is called a drake.
- A female duck is called a duck.
- A group of ducks on ground or in flight is called a flock.
- A group of ducks in the water is called a raft, team or paddling.

Females are the louder of the two genders (the opposite of chickens). Males or drakes are quieter but are very protective of females.

Some flock raisers choose to raise ducks simply for companionship, colorful feathers and backyard antics. Others raise ducks for eggs or meat; while some would like a dual-purpose breed. In any case, ducks can be excellent lawn and garden helpers, and they love eating mosquitos.

Ducks are known to enjoy playing in water. They have a thick layer of down and their feathers have a natural oil, waterproof protectant. They can fully submerge under water, and the down feathers against the bird's skin will stay dry. Due to their affection for water, ducks can be a bit messy.

Many duck breeds will live up to 8 to 10 years, and most domestic breeds are unable to fly. Many of the principles of keeping chickens also apply to ducks but keep reading to learn about their differences.

Birds	Move to coop	First egg	Lifespan
Ducks	4-8 weeks	24-26 weeks	8-10 years
Chickens	6-8 weeks	18-20 weeks	8-10 years

### Getting started.

First, make sure ducks are permitted in your area. Contact your local government officials to see if any restrictions apply.

No matter why you choose to raise ducks, we recommend starting with at least three. Ducks are social creatures and are happiest in small groups. They typically bond with other ducks even when commingled with chickens.

If you're a more experienced duck raiser with a larger flock, consider a ratio of one male for every 12 females.

Ducklings can be purchased from hatcheries, breeders and many local Purina® retail locations. To prevent potential disease problems, make sure ducklings are from a credible U.S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean hatchery or trusted breeder.

### Raising chickens and ducks together.

The two species commingle well; but because ducks enjoy both land and water, they require slightly different management than chickens.

#### Keep these differences in mind when raising the two together:

- Ducklings grow quicker than chicks, which means they can venture outside sooner.
- Ducks enjoy playing in water, which can be messy. However, a place to swim is not a requirement for raising ducks. If you do offer a place to swim, the brooder will need to be cleaned more often
- To prevent messes, ducks should have more outdoor space than chickens.
- Ducks prefer spending time on the ground. They will sleep and lay eggs lower to the ground and do not need nest boxes or roosting bars. Given the chance, they will lay eggs in new hiding places regularly.
- Male ducks are not sexually compatible with female chickens and can cause complications during breeding. Do not keep male ducks with chickens.

The biggest management difference between the two species is housing. See page 26 to learn more.



# Choosing a duck breed:

The first fun decision you'll have when raising ducks is picking a breed. To observe breed differences and increase "Poultry TV" entertainment value, consider a mixture of poultry breeds.

Whether you choose to raise waterfowl as pets, for eggs or meat, a Purina® complete feed will provide unique nutrients – including niacin – that ducks need to start strong and stay strong without a need to supplement.

## Egg laying duck breeds:

These duck breeds are known for laying flavorful, nutrient-dense eggs. Feed ducks Purina® Duck Feed pellets or Purina® Flock Raiser®. Supplement laying ducks with Purina® Oyster Shell at 24 to 26 weeks when ducks begin laying.

### Campbell



© Cackle Hatchery®

- Often known as the Khaki Campbell for its tan color
- Most prolific egg layer, active foragers, well-suited to a variety of climates
- 250-340 white to cream-tinted eggs per year
- 3.5-4.0 lb

### Magpie



- Lightweight and quiet, calm temperament
- Up to 290 eggs per year in a variety of colors from white and cream to blue and green
- 4.0-5.0 lb

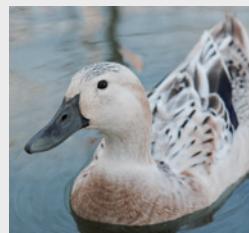
### Runner



© Jeanette Beranger / The Livestock Conservancy

- Often known as the Indian Runner
- Entertaining, tall and slender, excellent foragers
- 200-300 eggs per year, color varies by strain and can be white, dark green, and tan
- 4.0-5.0 lb

### Welsh Harlequin



- Prolific egg layer, calm personality, small size, beautifully colored
- Strong maternal instincts and likely to go broody
- 275-325 white eggs per year
- 4.5-5.5 lb

**Khaki Campbell**

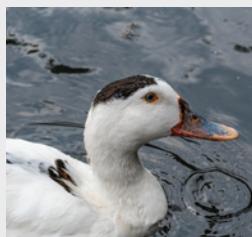




## Dual-purpose duck breeds:

These dual-purpose breeds can produce a consistent supply of eggs and/or be harvested for their meat. If you are raising ducks for dual-purpose, start them on Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®. For laying ducks, supplement with Purina® Oyster Shell at 24 to 26 weeks of age, or when ducks begin laying.

### Ancona



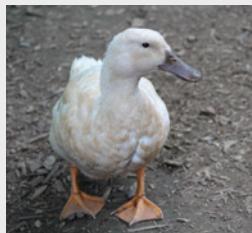
- Prolific egg layer, excellent foragers, comes in many colors
- 210-280 white and cream to blue and green eggs per year
- 6.0-6.5 lb

### Muscovy



- Large body size, hot weather tolerant
- 180 cream eggs per year
- Female: 8.0-10.0 lb; Male: 12.0-15.0 lb

### Orpington



- Unique hybrid of Cayuga, Runner, Aylesbury and Rouen breeds
- 150-220 white-tinted eggs per year
- 7.0-8.0 lb

### Swedish



© Cackle Hatchery®

- Most commonly known as "Swedish Blue" due to the popular blue variety but also come in Black, Silver and Splashed color varieties
- Calm, extremely hardy, good foragers, decent layer, mature slowly
- 120-180 white or green- or blue-tinted eggs per year
- 6.5-8.0 lb

### Saxony



- Curious, good foragers adapt to a variety of environments and climates
- 190-240 white, blue or green eggs per year
- 6.0-8.0 lb



## Meat duck breeds:

These market duck breeds grow quickly, often reaching harvest weight in eight weeks. Start and finish meat ducks on Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®.

### Ayelsbury



- Docile, friendly, pure white, grows fast – reaches market weight in 8 weeks
- 35-120 white or greenish eggs per year
- 9.0-10.0 lb

### Pekin



© Cackle Hatchery®

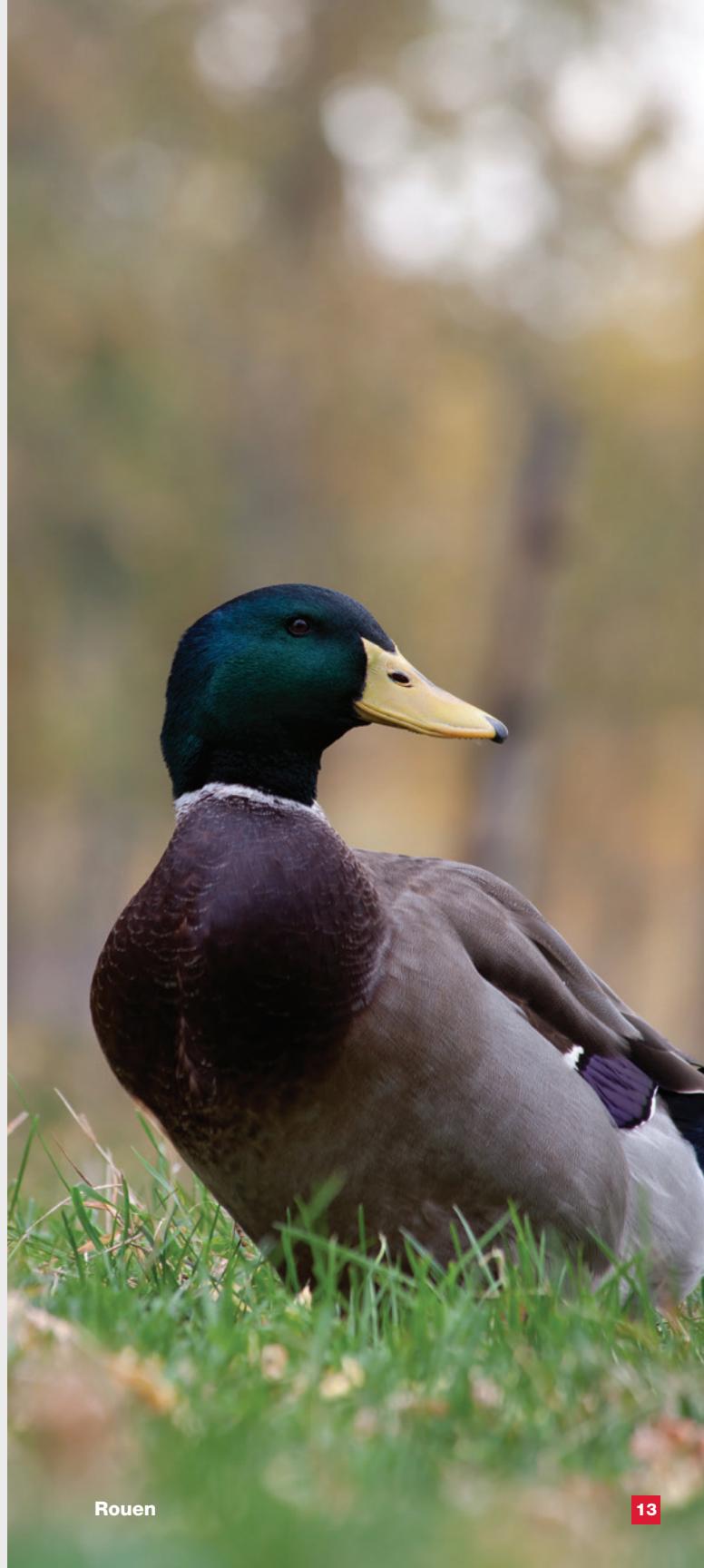
- Docile and easy-going breed
- Solid white in color and most popular U.S. domestic duck
- Jumbo-sized eggs, hearty appetite
- 200 white or tinted eggs per year
- 8.0-11.0 lb

### Rouen



© Cackle Hatchery®

- Calm and social. Popular for decorating ponds because they are colored like the wild Mallard but too heavy to fly away.
- 25-125 blue-tinted eggs per year
- 7.0-10.0 lb
- Slow to mature (6-8 months)



Rouen



## Ornamental duck breeds:

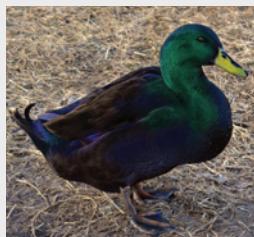
Ornamental duck breeds are known for colorful feathers and entertaining personalities. They are typically smaller in body size and lay fewer eggs than other ducks. Ornamental ducks should be fed Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser® from day one through adulthood. For laying ducks, supplement with Purina® Oyster Shell at 24 to 26 weeks of age, or when ducks begin laying.

### Call Ducks



- Talkative, lively and full of character, they have a small body with a short beak
- Can typically fly
- Not heavy layers (50-150 eggs per year), eggs are usually white, or lightly tinted green or blue
- 1.0-1.5 lb

### Cayuga



- Unique iridescent plumage, medium body size, very quiet
- Fun Fact: The first eggs of the season are black and then lighten to gray, blue, green and white as the season progresses
- 100-150 black to white eggs per year
- 6.0-8.0 lb

### Crested



- Named for the tuft of feathers on its head, more nervous than other breeds, lays well, good growth rate
- 100-130 white or blue eggs per year
- Standard size: 6.0-7.0 lb; Bantam size: 2.0-2.5 lb



Call Duck



## Feeding ducks

Feeding ducks is simple. Choose a complete feed that matches your duck's age and purpose.

Whether you choose to raise ducks for eggs, meat or as pets, a complete feed will provide all nutrients they need to start strong and stay strong – no need to supplement.

Laying ducks should lay their first egg around 26 weeks of age and each consume about 55-70 pounds of feed during this time. Meat ducks should reach maturity in about 7-8 weeks and each consume about 8-11 pounds of feed during this time.

**For ducklings:** One of the most important nutrients for ducklings is niacin. Niacin promotes strong bones and supports ducklings' quick growth. Ducks are not as prolific at making niacin inside their bodies, so we need to be sure to offer enough niacin in their diet to meet their needs.



Purina® Duck Feed and Purina® Flock Raiser® include essential nutrients – including niacin – for strong starts. The niacin requirement for ducks is 55 ppm (mg/kg). Purina® Duck Feed and Purina® Flock Raiser® both contain at least 60 ppm of niacin. These feeds also have 19 percent and 20 percent protein, respectively, to promote healthy growth and strong bones.

Feed either Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser® as the sole diet from day one through first egg. You do not need to supplement brewer's yeast if you're feeding one of these feeds.

Keep in mind ducklings should not be fed a medicated starter-grower feed. Medicated starter feeds include amprolium, a coccidiostat which is not approved for use with ducks. Wait to introduce treats or scratch until ducks are mature size.

**For egg laying:** If you are raising ducks for eggs, start them on Purina® Duck Feed or Flock Raiser® and add supplemental Purina® Oyster Shell at 24 to 26 weeks of age, or when ducks begin laying.

Similar to laying chickens, laying ducks require 4 grams of calcium per day to produce an eggshell. If the necessary calcium is not included in their feed, ducks will pull the nutrient from their bones, weakening their skeletal structure.



Purina® Game Bird Layena® is another choice. While the amount of calcium in this diet is adequate for most laying ducks, if you have a prolific egg layer - like the Khaki Campbell - it is recommended to provide supplemental Purina® Oyster Shell in a separate feeder.



Laying ducks are very sensitive to feed changes, so limit changes during egg production. They could go into an early molt or drastically reduce egg production. Transition your birds from one feed to the next over a period of about 7 days to reduce the risk of impacting egg production.

Laying ducks will consume an estimated 20 to 30 percent more feed than a similarly sized chicken because they channel more energy into producing nutrient-dense, large eggs.

When females stop laying eggs, switch them back to Purina® Duck Feed or Flock Raiser® until egg production begins again.

### Duck Feeding Directions

Hatch ..... Laying ..... Non-Laying

Purina®  
Duck Feed

Purina®  
Duck Feed  
+

Purina®  
Oyster Shell  
Supplement

Purina®  
Duck Feed

Purina®  
Flock Raiser®



## Feeding ducks (continued)

**Molt:** Laying ducks will replace their feathers in early summer and may lay fewer eggs during molt. Male ducks will also molt in early spring to shed their muted feathers to be replaced with bright feathers. Unlike chickens, a duck's molt should only take a few weeks and will be less noticeable since they keep their waterproof top feathers. To help ducks through molt, feed a higher protein feed, like Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®, to support feather regrowth.

**For meat ducks and adult drakes:** Keep meat ducks and adult drakes on Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser® from day one. The higher protein and lower calcium levels in these feeds are formulated for healthy growth or maintenance.

**Treats, greens and scratch grains:** Once mature, ducks love their leafy greens and foraging the backyard. Greens can also help with getting darker, richer eggs. Like chickens, they also like watermelon and cucumbers.

Keep in mind, these treats are similar to candy. Therefore, the same 90/10 rule we recommend for chickens also applies to ducks. For every half cup of complete feed, ducks can have up to 2 tablespoons of treats or scratch.



Ninety percent of your birds' diet should come from a complete feed and no more than 10 percent from treats, scraps and scratch grains. Given the chance, birds will eat the goodies first and not have room for their complete feed. Always feed the complete feed before treats or foraging.

**Grit not needed:** If you're feeding a complete feed or your birds are able to free range, grit is not needed.

### Purina® Farm to Flock™ Treats

Purina® Farm to Flock™ Treats include the nutrients your ducks need. You don't need to feel guilty treating your ducks with Farm to Flock™ Treats, as this nutritionally balanced flock treat provides your girls a mix of grains with vitamins, minerals and amino acids in every delightful bite.

Purina® Farm to Flock™ Treats are available in two varieties: Wholesome Hen Treats and High Protein (20 percent). The high-protein option helps give a nutritional boost, especially during molt when birds need additional protein.



**While ducks are laying eggs, feed one complete feed for at least 90% of the diet:**



**The other 10% of their diet can come from treats, scratch grains or treats they find while foraging.**



### Suggested Feed Ratio





## Purina® Flock Raiser® Crumbles or Pellets

**Why choose Purina® Flock Raiser®:** Flock Raiser® is recommended for feeding one diet to mixed flocks or non-laying birds. If birds in the flock are laying eggs, supplement with Purina® Oyster Shell.

### Key benefits and features:

- **20% protein:** Increased protein supports high energy demands that include quick growth, feather regrowth and flock maintenance
- **Essential amino acids:** Enhanced lysine and methionine to support muscle and skeletal development
- **Prebiotics and probiotics:** Supports immune and digestive health
- **Vitamins A, B, D, E and K:** Help chicks grow into healthy adult birds
- **Niacin:** Guaranteed niacin levels required for ducklings
- **Available in pellets and crumbles:** Choice is a personal preference. Pellets are a great way to limit feed waste and crumbles are easier for young birds to eat.

### Feeding directions:

Feed Purina® Flock Raiser® for at least 90 percent of the diet. If birds in the flock are laying eggs, supplement with Purina® Oyster Shell.

Feed Purina® Flock Raiser® free-choice as the sole ration to ducks intended for meat production from hatch to market weight and male ducks.



## Purina® Duck Feed Pellets

**Why choose Purina® Duck Feed:** Purina® Duck Feed is specialized to meet the unique nutritional needs of ducks.

### Key benefits and features:

- **19% protein:** Specific protein levels to support duck growth and energy demands
- **Unique and complete formula:** Balanced formula with all the specific nutrients ducklings need to grow and adult ducks need to maintain proper health
- **Niacin:** Includes at least 60 ppm (mg/kg) niacin to meet ducklings' higher niacin requirements for bone growth and development, specifically in their legs
- **Prebiotics and probiotics:** Supports immune and digestive health
- **Available in mini pellets only:** Smaller pellets are easier for young birds to eat.

### Feeding directions:

Feed Purina® Duck Feed for at least 90 percent of the diet.

If birds in the flock are laying eggs, supplement with Purina® Oyster Shell.

Feed Purina® Duck Feed

free-choice as the sole ration to ducks intended for meat production from hatch to market weight and male ducks.





# Starting ducklings strong

**Ducklings:** You've picked a breed and mapped out your feeding program. Now it's time to set up the brooder. The three essentials are the same for all baby poultry: warmth, water and feed. It's often best to raise ducklings and chicks separately as ducklings grow quicker and can create a wet environment for chicks.

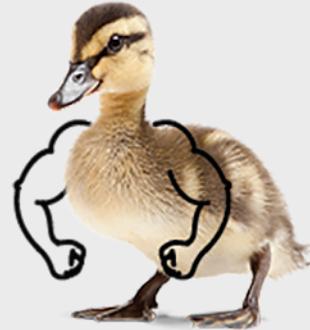
**Brooder:** Each duckling should have about one-half square foot of floor space for their first four weeks and then 2 to 4 square feet each from weeks four to eight.

Ducks don't require as much time in the brooder as chickens do. Ducks grow tremendously faster than chickens. Start the brooder at 90 degrees F for the first week, then drop the brooder temperature 5 to 10 degrees F each week until you hit 70 degrees F. Depending on the outside temperature, your brooder phase should be between 2 and 4 weeks long. Always let the birds be your final guide as to what is too hot or too cold. Adjust the temperature accordingly.

Watch where ducklings spend time to determine temperature. They should be spread around the brooder. Ducklings huddled under the heat lamp are too cold. Ducklings spending time near the brooder walls are too warm.

## Listen to the Ducklings

Too Hot	Just Right!	Too Cold	Draft
 Little noise Panting Wings extended	 Even distribution	 Crowding under heat source Distress calling	 Uneven temperature distribution Check surrounding area



Try to keep the brooder as dry as possible. Pine shavings make great bedding but will need replaced regularly. Consider placing the feeder and waterer on small pans to catch spills. Ducklings are notoriously mischievous, so set aside time to clean the brooder at least daily.

**Water:** Water is the most important nutrient for ducklings – and ducklings will drink a lot, about three times as much as chicks. Be sure to show the ducks where the water is. It is not recommended to have an open water container around ducks. They will try everything to get in it and splash around. A nipple waterer will limit the amount of water in the brooder. If you do use a bell waterer, then be sure that there is a limited amount of open space to prevent ducks from playing in the water and making a mess.

From that point forward, provide fresh, clean water to ducklings at all times. Water helps ducklings get food down, cleans their beak vents and keeps their nasal cavities moist. Place water near the ducklings' feed. You'll notice ducks fill their bills with feed and then dip it in water to moisten it before swallowing. In the first few weeks, each duckling will drink about one-half gallon of water per week.



## Starting ducklings strong (continued)

**Water (continued):** Make sure the water you provide is no deeper than one-quarter inch, and they can easily escape the water. Young ducklings enjoy playing in water but can easily drown if they get tired. They won't begin producing waterproofing oil until 4 weeks of age (a mother duck spreads this oil on her ducklings in the wild). Because they do not have the protective oil, allowing them to swim too early could result in death from chill or drowning from fatigue.

Ducklings can swim briefly while supervised after their first week of age and are typically great swimmers at about five weeks of age.

**Nutrition:** Ducklings grow quickly and will eat more than baby chicks.

Start your ducks on Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®. Both diets will provide your ducklings the nutrition they need to get off to a strong start. Ducklings should not be fed a medicated starter feed.

Niacin is an important nutrient for ducklings. Niacin helps build strong bones, especially important for baby ducklings who grow quickly. Ducks are not able to produce enough niacin on their own to meet the demands of their growing body, so we need to be sure that they are getting enough niacin in their diet. A young duck's inability to stand could be a sign that your duck is not getting the proper nutrition.

Purina® Duck Feed and Purina® Flock Raiser® include this essential vitamin for strong starts. The niacin requirement for ducks is 55 ppm (mg/kg). Both Purina® Duck Feed and Purina® Flock Raiser® contain at least 60 ppm of niacin.

Provide free-choice access to Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®. Ducklings will eat as much as they need to grow strong from day one. Don't let the feeders run empty. Ensuring the birds always have access to a complete feed will help them develop properly and live up to their genetic potential.

**Spend time with them:** Ducklings create social bonds early in life which carry through adulthood. Spend time handling, talking to and hand-feeding ducklings from the start. These early bonds often result in friendly ducks later in life.





## Duck housing

While ducks are growing in the brooder, setup their adult duck house so it's ready for them around week four.

You may choose to house your chickens and ducks together. Adult chickens and ducks can make excellent companions, but some raisers prefer a shelter for each. If your ducks will live in the chicken coop, make a few adjustments to keep the ducks comfortable.

Structures built specifically for ducks can have more airflow and moisture allowance than a chicken coop. Ducks are great temperature self-regulators. Their down feathers trap air under the outside feathers for added warmth; the house should be draft-free but not heated.

Duck housing can be a simple three-sided structure that is only 3 feet high. If the duck house is raised off the ground, add a low-incline ramp for ducks to easily waddle on in. A run or fence should be at least 2.5 feet tall to keep ducks inside.

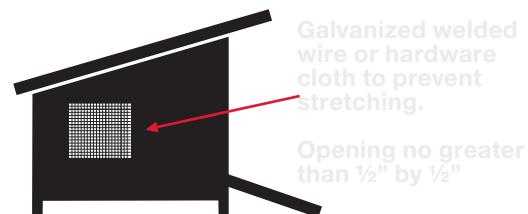
Nest boxes and roosts aren't required. Ducks don't roost like chickens and are comfortable nesting on the floor at night. You'll often see ducks sleeping next to each other in a row. Add a layer of straw to the floor and ducks will build their nests on the ground.

**Space requirements:** Like chickens, mature ducks require 4 square feet of indoor space and 10 square feet of outdoor space; however, you may opt to offer more space as ducks' webbed feet compact soil. Ducks enjoy spending most of their time outside, so a fenced-in yard or a large run is ideal.

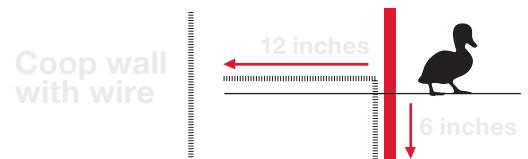
**Predator proofing:** Because ducks sleep on the ground, they are susceptible to predators. Keep them safe by bringing them into an enclosed or fenced in space each night. Predator-proof the coop or house with one-half inch welded steel wire over the windows and buried underground around the perimeter. Like with chicken coops, do not use chicken wire for your fencing as it will easily stretch.

## How to: Predator-proof the coop

### 1. Add screens to the doors, windows and runs.



### 2. Bury galvanized wire underground to prevent burrowing predators.





## Growing ducks

Ducks grow quickly and you'll be amazed by the changes you see each day. Most breeds will reach mature size by just 8-12 weeks of age.

**Moving ducklings outside:** Generally, ducklings are ready to start spending time outside when they are about four weeks old and can live outside completely at week six.

At four weeks, their outer feathers should start growing in. Start by spending short supervised time outdoors in a contained area – with 1-square foot of floor space each – as long as it is at least 65 degrees F outside.

At night, you can either bring ducklings back inside or keep ducks in a small, draft-free section of the coop or duck house. If it is cooler than 65 degrees F outside, ducklings should have supplemental heat. From weeks four to eight, ducklings are still mastering regulating their body temperatures.

During this time, ducklings may enjoy a small pool to swim in. Just make sure they get warmed up when they come out of the water. Taking this extra step is especially important if the water temperature is below 75 degrees F.

While a swimming pool or pond provides exercise and entertainment, it isn't necessary for growing ducks.

By 8 weeks old, ducklings should be fully feathered. At this point, they can tolerate 30 to 40 degrees F and can regulate their temperatures well. You can now integrate them with chickens or other poultry that are the same size and age.

**Feed:** Continue feeding Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser® to ducks as they grow. During this stage, ducks will eat a considerable amount to support quick growth. Offer free-choice complete feed to meet these needs. Wait until they are mature size to introduce treats or scratch.

**Water requirements:** An adult duck will drink up to one-half gallon of water each day. Provide clean, fresh drinking water at all times.

Ducks love playing in their waterer, so keep it in the run or yard and away from the sleeping area. Water should be deep enough for ducks to dip their heads into up to their eyes. Ducks are more susceptible to eye infections, and this gives them an easy way to wash their eyes. A deeper water source is also important to keep the ducks' mucous membranes on their bills moist.

A small pail or duck waterer can work well. Both ducklings and adult ducks will drop feed into their water, so replace water daily. To cut down on the mess, you can choose to use a nipple waterer instead of an open container.

**Gender:** You should start noticing gender differences around 10 weeks of age. Completely opposite from chickens, female ducks will be the louder gender. Female ducks will have a loud quack while male drakes make more of a hissing sound. Color sexing is dependent on breed. Drakes can become aggressive, so it is best to limit the duck-to-drake ratio to 12-to-1 or fewer.

If you choose to mix chickens and ducks together, do not raise male ducks. Roosters and drakes get along well. However, chicken hens are not equipped to mate with male ducks, putting them at risk for complications.

**Flight:** Most domestic breeds are unable to fly and will stay near their source of feed, water and shelter. This is because of the larger body size as compared to wild ducks. There are a few domestic breeds, like the Call Duck, who can fly though. During this time, you may need to clip their wings or have a training plan to teach ducks to return home each night.



# Foraging and swimming

Now that your ducks are outside, they should have plenty of space to channel their rambunctious energy. Ducks are adventurous birds and, given the chance, will spend hours exploring the backyard or playing in a small pool.

**Foraging:** If your ducks will free-range, fence off areas you'd like to protect in advance. Ducks are great foragers and enjoy snacking on bugs. Protect plants until they are well-established as ducks like snacking on seeds and seedlings. Consider planting a duck-friendly garden or area of the backyard for ducks to explore with strong plants and hardy perennials.

Start by letting ducks explore a fenced-in area during supervised periods of time. Train them to come back to the coop or duck house by shaking a bucket of feed or treats and calling to the ducks. Ducks love routine and will recognize these cues to come back when called.

Despite the delicious treats from foraging, bugs and the garden, ducks still need a feed specifically formulated to provide the nutrients they need to start strong and stay strong.

Don't forget the 90/10 rule. Ninety percent of your birds' diet should come from a complete feed and no more than 10 percent from treats, scraps or scratch grains.

If birds free-range or have treat access, start by feeding their complete feed in the morning before they go out exploring. Remember that scratch grains should be viewed as a treat and not be mixed with the complete feed. Complete feeds are formulated to provide all the nutrients ducks need, in the correct amounts.

**Pond or pool:** One of the most popular duck questions received is if ducks need a pool or pond. Most ducks enjoy swimming, but a pool is not a necessity. Ducks only need enough water to submerge their heads to keep their mucous membranes of their bills wet.

Still, a small kiddie pool, livestock trough or pond will be well-used by a flock of ducks. Rather than dust bathing like chickens, ducks prefer to paddle in water. Some duck raisers add drains to their pools for easy cleaning. The water will need to be drained quite regularly as ducks are very messy.

**Nesting:** Free-ranging ducks are prone to build nests and lay eggs around the backyard especially in early spring when they often go broody. Create a comfortable nesting spot on the floor of the duck house to encourage a regular laying spot. Then collect eggs at least twice daily.

If you would like your duck to hatch baby ducklings, the hatching process is similar to chickens. You will need a drake present to fertilize the eggs. Ducks will build a clutch of eggs, typically up to 12 eggs, and lay on the nest for the 28-day incubation period (35 days for Muscovy ducks). Provide feed and water close to the nest but be careful as expectant duck mothers can be very protective. The drake may also help protect the nest.

**Social:** As with ducklings, mature ducks enjoy spending time in groups with other ducks. If a duck is isolated, he or she may exhibit signs of loneliness quickly. Keep a flock of at least three ducks.



# Duck eggs

Many flock raisers keep ducks for their healthy, nutritious eggs. Ducks take a bit longer than chickens to reach sexual maturity and will lay their first egg around week 26. You do not need a drake for ducks to lay eggs.

**Switch to layer feed:** At week 26 or when the first egg arrives, add supplemental Purina® Oyster Shell to an existing diet of Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®.

Purina® Game Bird Breeder Layena® is another choice for laying ducks. This feed provides unique nutrients ducks require to produce strong shells. Since many ducks are not as proficient at laying eggs as chickens, this feed contains less calcium. If you have a breed of duck that will lay 200-300 eggs per year, it is recommended to offer supplemental oyster shell in addition to the layer feed. This ensures your birds are getting enough calcium to maintain egg production and strong shells.

Make the feed transition over time. Mix the starter and layer feed evenly for four or five days. The more similar the two feeds are, the more smoothly the transition will go.

Many ducks will eat the mixed feed without noticing a difference. When ducks are eating both feeds, stop feeding the starter feed and make the complete switch to all layer feed.

Laying ducks will consume an estimated 20 to 30 percent more feed than a similarly sized chicken because they channel more energy into producing nutrient-dense, large eggs.

When females stop laying eggs, switch them back to Purina® Duck Feed, Flock Raiser® or Purina® Game Bird Maintenance Chow until egg production begins again.

**Duck egg nutrition:** Like chickens, ducks channel nutrients from their feed directly into their eggs. The better the feed, the more nutrient-dense egg they'll produce.

Some duck breeds can hold their own with the best chicken breeds, laying up to and even beyond 300 eggs per year. The laying season for prolific egg layers is between 35 and 45 weeks out of the year and most do not need supplemental lighting during shorter autumn and winter days. Like chickens, production will peak in the first couple years and decline each year thereafter.

A standard duck egg is typically 30 percent larger than a chicken egg with a naturally stronger shell and bigger yolk. Many families enjoy their richer and creamier taste and duck eggs are popular for baking. When making recipes using duck eggs, you'll want to take their larger size into consideration.

The nutritional breakdown of duck eggs is higher in all categories – mostly a benefit except for the higher levels of cholesterol. Here are the general nutrition facts for duck vs. chicken eggs<sup>1</sup>:

Duck Egg Facts (70g)	Chicken Egg Facts (Large Egg, 50g)
Calories: 130	Calories: 71
Total Fat: 10g	Total Fat: 5g
Cholesterol: 619mg	Cholesterol: 211mg
Sodium: 102mg	Sodium: 70mg
Total Carbohydrate: 1g	Total Carbohydrate: 0g
Protein: 9g	Protein: 6g

## What are the benefits of eating duck eggs?

- Richer, with more albumen (egg white), which makes cakes and other pastries fluffier
- Naturally have more omega-3 fatty acids.
- People who cannot eat chicken eggs, due to allergies, can often eat duck eggs. When allergies are a concern, always check with your doctor first.

<sup>1</sup> Ames, Marissa. "Duck Eggs vs. Chicken Eggs." <https://countrysidenetwork.com/daily/poultry/eggs-meat/egg-facts-duck-eggs-vs-chicken-eggs/>. 9 August 2018.



## Duck meat

Many flock raisers choose to keep ducks for meat. Market breeds like the Ayelsbury, Pekin and Rouen grow quickly and often reach harvest weight in eight weeks.

Start and finish market ducks on Purina® Duck Feed or Purina® Flock Raiser®.

### Benefits of duck meat include:

- An excellent source of high-quality protein containing a well-balanced array of amino acids.
- Contains generous amounts of iron, phosphorus, zinc, copper, selenium, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, Vitamin B6, and Vitamin B12.
- Duck meat is very flavorful and can be incorporated into a healthy, balanced diet.

## Stay connected

We are happy to be with you each step of the way—celebrating memorable moments, answering questions and sharing in the joy of backyard chickens.

We would love to hear your story and share more flock fun with you online. Each of our channels offers a unique, educational experience. Please connect with us on the platforms that work best for you.

For additional and more in-depth chicken raising information, visit [www.purinamills.com/chicken-feed](http://www.purinamills.com/chicken-feed).



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