

## TURKEY INFORMATION SHEET

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** This information sheet is provided only as a starting point for raising turkeys. It is highly recommended that you read multiple articles from the Internet to include:

- **Heritage Turkey Manual:** <http://www.livestockconservancy.org/index.php/resources/internal%20turkey-manual>

Turkeys have an average lifespan of 10-12 years. Turkeys mature at a similar pace as chickens generally laying their first eggs in March their first year. Turkeys have a reputation for being difficult to raise; however, with proper care you can be successful.



1. **TURKEY POULTS:** Young turkey poults have a high mortality rate until they are several months old. If you buy young poults, they must be carefully cared for until they reach 3-4 months; this include adequate heat, protection from drafts and the elements, and a clean environment.
2. **FEEDING POULTS:** Personally, I feed turkey poults a mixture of ½ medicated chick starter (20% protein) and ½ unmedicated game bird starter (28% protein) until they are 14 weeks old
3. **FEEDING ADULTS:** Personally, I feed adult birds 17% chicken laying pellets. Some breeders recommend feeding higher protein game bird maintenance while others recommend feeding 20% chicken laying pellets just prior to and during laying season.  
"Growing birds, from first feather growth to sexual maturity, require a lower protein (20%) level in the feed; but must have a good balance of calcium and phosphorus for proper bone growth. Once the bird matures the protein level should be reduced to 17%, as found in maintenance feed." *Heritage Turkey Manual*, The Livestock Conservatory
4. **BROODING POULTS:** Like chickens, young turkeys require a draft free environment with supplemental heat during the first six-weeks of their life. Generally, you should start day-old poults off at 95° F for the first week dropping the temperature 5° each week until the poults are 6 weeks old (95, 90, 85, 80, 75, 70). Be sure that there is sufficient room in the brooder for the poults to escape the heat if they become overheated. Like chickens, slippery bedding such as slick newspaper can cause spraddle legs and should be avoided. Personally, I use an old bed sheet and/or bath towel to make for easy cleanup.
5. **COCCIDIOSIS:** Young turkey poults seem more susceptible to coccidiosis than chickens and should be raised in a coop with hardware cloth flooring until they are 8-12 weeks old. Medicated chick/game bird starter feed is recommended. If a raised coop is not available, turkeys should raised on fresh, clean, dry ground where chickens have not been raised.
6. **RAISING WITH CHICKENS:** Chickens sometimes carry diseases such as Blackhead that barely affect them but are deadly to turkeys. Most professional breeders do not recommend raising turkeys in the same pens where chickens have been during the previous three year. However, many hobbyist raise turkeys and chickens together without any ill effects. If you plan to mix chickens and turkeys, it is highly recommended that you institute a strict worming regime as parasitic worms often host the problem causing protozoa.
7. **HOUSING:** Turkeys require an absolute minimum of 4 square feet of coop and 10 square feet of outdoor space per bird. They generally do well during the winter cold in shelters with three sides with a southerly side open. Most of my adult turkeys prefer to spend their nights outside even during the coldest of East Texas nights.
8. **PREDATORS:** Heritage Bronze turkeys are heavy birds with poor flying skills. They are very susceptible to fast predators such as dogs and coyotes. In general, turkeys that fly outside my protective fence have become food for wild animals. At minimum, my countries pens use 5 foot welded wire fencing with at least 8 inches of the bottom wire buried. Additionally, one or two strands of barbed wire are run along the top of the fence to discourage predators from climbing over the fence.
9. **FLIGHT:** Turkeys are poor flyers but like to roost in trees or on roof tops and they can easily jump a 4 foot fence even with clipped wings. Clipping the flight feathers of one wing, especially during the first year, discourages flight and helps keep them within a confined area.
10. **NOISE:** My turkeys are for the most part quiet birds; the male gobbling does not generally create a noise problem.
11. **GENDER:** Determining the gender of young turkeys can be difficult and generally not accurate until they are at least 8 weeks old. Male turkeys can be differentiated from females through their thicker legs, longer snoots, and larger carbuncles (bumps on the neck).
12. **WORMING:** Breeders recommend worming at least twice a year worming in February before the turkey laying season and in September when it is over. Panacur or Safeguard (Fenbendazole Suspension 10%) is frequently recommended and is available at Tractor Supply. To break the life cycle of parasites for birds not regularly wormed, repeat the worming process in 10 days.

**HUMAN SALMONELLA INFECTIONS FROM BABY POULTRY:** Baby poultry can carry harmful germs called Salmonella. After you touch a chick, duckling, or other baby bird, or anything in the area where they live and roam, WASH YOUR HANDS so you don't get sick!

## Why do turkeys seem perfectly healthy one day and die the next?

### Are these the kind of turkeys that drop dead for no reason?

Young turkeys are susceptible to protozoa (single cell parasites such as Coccidiosis) that attack the liver and intestinal tract. By the time a turkey displays any symptoms, the damage has already been done and is usually not reversible. Affected young turkeys usually die from dehydration and/or starvation because their system cannot absorb needed nutrients. Protozoa frequently enter a turkey's system by catching a ride on other parasites such as round worm larvae. While chickens also suffer from these parasites, the damage is usually not nearly as severe.



*Treating affected turkeys with antibiotics or other drugs after they become sick rarely works; **PREVENTION is the only way to effectively address potential protozoa problems.***

### STEPS FOR PREVENTION

1. Some people assume that turkeys mature more quickly than chickens since they are larger and grow faster. This is a mistake. Young turkeys need supplemental heat, protection from drafts, and dampness just like baby chicks. Turkey poults should remain in a brooder environment until they are at least six weeks old.
2. Old timers will tell you not to feed turkeys medicated feed; they claim that it will kill young turkeys. This is an error. Medicated chick starter containing amprolium is perfectly safe for turkeys although because turkeys eat more, they may get a larger dose. Personally, I feed young turkeys  $\frac{1}{2}$  medicated chick starter and  $\frac{1}{2}$  non-medicated game bird starter. Amprolium, also known as Corid, is not an antibiotic discourages the growth of Coccidiosis. Corid will have no effect once a bird become ill.
3. For best results, do not allow turkeys to touch the ground until they are 9-12 weeks old. You can use  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch hardware cloth, 2x4 lumber, and plastic netting to build a pen-platform 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 feet off the ground. I'd be happy to show you the "grow-up" pens that I use for turkeys and peafowl.
4. Raise turkey younger than 16 weeks-old on fresh ground that has not been exposed to chickens or other poultry for the previous three years. This can be accomplished by building a temporary pen from welded wire, metal t-posts, and a large dog house.
5. Before placing turkeys on the ground, be sure that the ground is well drained and free from water puddling during rains. In most cases, a simple shallow ditch can be effective in allowing water to drain away from areas where turkeys and other poultry like to rest. Training turkeys to sleep on roosts within dry shelters can also reduce the risks of young turkeys contracting parasites.
6. If you plan to mix your turkeys and other poultry, institute a strict worming program for all your poultry long before you place turkeys in with your other birds. Panacur or Safeguard (Fenbendazole Suspension 10%) is frequently recommended and is available at Tractor Supply. To break the life cycle of parasites for birds not regularly wormed, repeat the worming process in 10 days.