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Guinea Fowl Management
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There has been an increasing demand for guinea fowl recently. The meat of a young guinea is tender and of especially fine flavor, resembling that of wild game, and therefore has been substituted for game birds such as grouse, partridge, quail and pheasant. Guinea fowl has a taste similar to other game birds and has many nutritional qualities that make it a worthwhile addition to the diet. It is second only to turkey in calories, having 134 Kcal (Calories) per 100 grams (turkey has 109 Kcal). The meat is lean and is rich in essential fatty acids.

Why raise guinea fowl? There are many reasons. The guinea has been used in protecting the farm flock from intruders because of its loud, harsh, cry and its pugnacious disposition. Since one of the main sources of food for wild guineas is insects, they have gained popularity for use in reducing insect populations in gardens and around the home, especially because, unlike chickens, they do not scratch the dirt much and do very little damage to the garden. Recently, guineas have been used to reduce the deer tick population, associated with Lyme disease. Other people raise them for their unique ornamental value.

There are three principle varieties of helmeted guinea fowl reared in the United States at this time, the Pearl, White and Lavender. The head and neck are bare, but there may be some wattles. The wattles on the male guinea are much larger than on the female. The Pearl is the most popular variety and the one most people recognize. The Pearl has purplish-gray plumage regularly dotted or “pearled” with white spots and its feathers are often used for ornamental purposes. The next most common variety is the White Guinea (also called African White). The White Guinea has pure-white feathers and its skin is lighter than the other two varieties. These birds are not albino and are the only solid white bird that hatches solid white and not yellow. Lavender guineas are similar to the Pearl, but with plumage that is light gray or lavender dotted with white.

Basic Management of Guinea Fowl

If you already have other poultry, you will soon discover that guineas are not chickens. They are much more active than chickens and not as easily tamed. They seem to retain some of their wild behavior and will remind you of this whenever they get spooked.

Guineas require a dry environment with plenty of room. Guinea fowls are extremely good runners and use this method, rather than flying, to escape predators. Since most people raise guineas with the intention of letting them run loose after reaching adulthood, space is usually not a problem. If you are confining your birds for any length of time, give them as much room as possible outside and a minimum of 2-3 square feet per bird inside. The more room they have, the less likely they will become overly stressed. Guineas tolerate weather extremes fairly well after they are fully feathered

and have reached adult size.

Guineas begin to fly at a very early age and can be confined only in covered pens. It is not unusual to find adults roosting 20-30 feet above the ground complaining about everything they see. They are very strong fliers and the birds will often fly 400-500 feet at a time when moving around the farm, especially if startled.

The laying season will vary depending on your latitude and local weather patterns. The Pearl and Purple usually have the longest laying season and the lighter colors have the shortest.

Managing Adults

If you are purchasing guineas for tick and insect control then you are better off purchasing adult guineas as they require little care and do very well on their own. Clean water and a regular chicken laying mash is basically all you need to rear them. They enjoy a little scratch feed mixed in with their feed and scattered on the ground. If your birds are allowed to roam freely they will eat very little during the summer months. If you keep their feed restricted during the summer months, then they will spend more time eating insects.

Feeding Guineas

Keets need a 24% - 26% protein ration such as turkey starter or gamebird feed. It is recommend using an unmedicated feed to avoid potential problems with keets getting over-medicated. Reduce the protein to about 18% - 20% for the fifth through eighth weeks. After that they will do well on regular laying mash that is usually 16% protein. If you can't find feed with different amounts of protein, mix the higher protein feed with laying mash to get the proper protein mix. The guineas' natural diet consists of a high protein mix of seeds and insects. If your birds have a large area to roam they will usually get enough to eat on their own, but you can train the birds to stay closer to home by providing supplemental feed in a regular location. Guineas need a higher protein feed than chickens, but do quite well on regular poultry mash or crumbles. It is recommended that they be given only mash or crumbles instead of pelleted feed. They will not eat much supplemental feed if they are finding plenty to eat on their own, but it has been found that they really like wheat, milo, and millet and will clean up every kernel. However, only give whole or cracked grains as a treat or supplement, but not too much. The protein content is too low and the fat content too high to be much value. They don't care for the larger grains and will ignore whole corn kernels.

Make sure they have access to clean water. Give keets warm water only! They don't tolerate cold water well.

Sexing Guineas

One of the most-often asked questions about guineas is how to tell the hens from the cocks. Young guineas cannot be sight-sexed like other poultry or fowl. The hens and cocks look exactly the same except for some of the newer colors where the hens are darker, as both keets and adults. The only precise way to tell the sexes apart is to listen for the two-syllable call the hen makes. This sound has been described as sounding like "buckwheat, buckwheat", "put-rock, put-rock" or "qua-track, qua-track". This is the only sound that the hen makes that the rooster doesn't. The young birds start making these sounds at 6-8 weeks, but some hens do not start calling till much later.

