

Information Sourcing for the Poultry Enthusiast

The lure of a steady supply of fresh eggs is what motivates many beginners to build that first coop and then set out to find some hens to fill it. When starting out with chickens, commercial hybrids are a common choice since they are easy to find and readily available through hatcheries. Once beginners have discovered the benefits and enjoyment of keeping a few laying hens, some will be inspired to experiment with one or more specific breeds of chickens that interest them. And some of those new fanciers might even decide to take it one step further and start their own breeding program.

Not everyone is introduced to poultry keeping in exactly that manner, but no matter how they find their way into the hobby, newcomers will need some information and advice in order to be successful. Encouraging beginners to become more engaged in this hobby is vital, and one important way to offer support is by helping people access the information they need. I am hoping these suggestions will be helpful to those new to the hobby, and help get them started on a long and successful journey in poultry keeping.

The internet

The internet is known as “The Information superhighway” for good reason. The vast, almost limitless volume of information to be found online is truly astounding, and many people, especially the younger generation turn to the internet as their main (or only source) for finding answers and solving problems.

There is no question that there is a great deal of online support available to the novice poultry keeper. Discussion forums and Facebook groups can provide opportunities to gain advice, fellowship and support from the convenience of home. But there are limits to what can be found online as well as lots of conflicting information. Opinions offered via blogs, personal web pages and postings are most often well-meaning, but determining the credibility of these sources can be tricky. Unfortunately, the consequences of following faulty advice can be very detrimental and long lasting. So where do you go to find accurate information?

Books and Publications

There is plenty of excellent reading material available to chicken fanciers and aspiring breeders. Those who are sincere in their goal of becoming a breeder should be sure to invest in a copy of the *American Standard of Perfection*, available from the American Poultry Association. This is the foremost authority to poultry judges, breeders and exhibitors.

For a basic overview of care and husbandry, there is a great selection of books on the market including “Storey’s Guide to Raising Chickens” and “The Chicken Health Handbook” by [Gail Damerow](#), which is packed with helpful information covering nutrition, disease, anatomy and more. Those with an interest in showing will enjoy David Scrivener’s “Exhibition Poultry Keeping”. It gives a brief history of poultry shows and covers a number of topics from housing to breeding systems. When the time comes to delve in a bit deeper, look for books by authors such as Sigrid Van Dort, Brian Reeder or R. D. Crawford. There are even books that cater to very specific interests such as “21st Century Poultry Breeding” by Grant Brereton which explains the genetics of plumage patterns in detail. There are many other authors and books that come highly recommended, but these are a few that come to mind.

Mentorship

Reading is said to be the key to gaining knowledge, but even books don't have *all* the answers. The process of learning any new skill can be confusing and frustrating at times, and this is certainly true when trying to find your way around in the perplexing world of poultry breeding. This is where a trusted mentor becomes invaluable. A mentor can offer a guiding hand, share their expertise and help find a solution to a problem. This kind of support can't be found on the internet. For the lucky person who is able to gain the assistance of a mentor and benefit from their wisdom and experience, it can make all the difference in the world. All that is expected in return for these generous gifts is respect, enthusiasm, appreciation and a willingness to learn.

Trial and Error

Many of the pioneers of poultry who created the breeds and varieties we still enjoy today dedicated entire lifetimes to making their visions reality. At that time, the science of genetics was unknown or still in its infancy, but selective breeding for the improvement of animals and plants was certainly not a new idea. Still, it remained somewhat haphazard, relying on experience, trial and error and observation rather than on scientifically proven principles. Breeders in those days most often had to depend on their own instincts and then use the test of time to gauge results.

As modern breeders, we are fortunate to have many advantages that were not available to those dedicated men and women of the past. But breeding is still as much an art as it is a science. There is no substitution for hands-on learning. Trial and error is still a valuable and constructive way to gain skills and knowledge, and any positive results achieved this way are especially gratifying!

Clubs and organizations

Some of the most well-established breeders don't post their contact information on the internet at all, so finding sources for new breeding stock may not be as easy as doing a Google search. This is where Poultry Breed clubs can be particularly helpful. There are many different breed clubs which offer support and advice specific to the breeds you are most interested in. Most of them send out newsletters and breeder directories, which is often the key to finding the best source for new breeding stock. Joining a local poultry club is another way to become connected and acquainted with fellow breeders. These clubs serve many important functions such as organizing poultry shows and other events which are vital to keeping the hobby strong and viable. It's important to support these clubs with your membership dues and by pitching in to help when you can.

Shows

Poultry shows are an ideal place to network with breeders and meet others who share your interest in birds. Most exhibitors are very approachable and are pleased to discuss the merits and challenges of their chosen breeds. It's a good bet that meeting someone face to face and having a polite conversation about your goals and aspirations will go much farther than sending off a brief email to a breeder and expecting a thoughtful, helpful reply.

Knowledge is power, but sometimes it takes perseverance and determination to find the information we are looking for. And then we quickly find out that the learning never ends! I wish you every success in your own quest for knowledge!