

# **INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT CHICKENS**

## **Possible Showmanship Questions—part 1**

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One of the features that differentiate a chicken from most other birds is that it has a comb and two wattles. The comb is the red appendage on the top of the head, and the wattles are the two appendages under the chin. These are secondary sexual characteristics and are more prominent in the male.

The Red Jungle Fowl is the ancestor of most domestic chickens. There are nine recognized kinds of combs: single, rose, pea, cushion, buttercup, strawberry, chrysanthemum, V-shaped, and walnut.

Respiration rate is higher in chickens than in larger animals. In general, it can be said that the smaller the kind of bird the faster it breathes. For example, a hummingbird breathes more times a minute than a chicken. The male chicken breathes about 18 to 21 times a minute and the female about 31 to 37 times when they are not under stress.

The heartbeat of chickens is rather fast, being about 286 times a minute in males and 312 in females in a resting condition.

Digestion rate is somewhat rapid in chickens. It varies from 2 1/2 to 25 hours for passage of food depending on whether the digestion tract is full, partially full, or empty when feed is ingested.

The chicken's temperature is about 107 degrees to 107.5 degrees F.

The chicken has pneumatic bones, making its body lighter for flying, if it has not lost the ability to do so except for short distances.

Chickens have comparatively short life spans. Some live to be 10 to 15 years old, but they are the exception, not the rule. Chickens have both white (breast) and dark (legs, thighs, back, and neck) meat. The wings contain both light and dark fibers.

### **Classifications of Chickens**

The breeds and varieties of domestic chickens known today are generally believed to have descended mainly from the Red Jungle Fowl of Southeast Asia where it still exists in the wild. Domesticated chickens may have been kept in India as long ago as 3,200 B.C., and records indicate they were kept in China and Egypt as early as 1,400 B.C. The earliest domestications of fowl were mainly for cockfighting rather than for food. Cockfighting was suppressed in the Western World and replaced by poultry exhibition before the 18th Century.

Poultry exhibitions started in America in 1849 and the American Poultry Association was founded in 1873 and also has the distinction of being the oldest livestock association in the United States. Interest in these shows grew and numerous breeds and varieties were and continue to be developed, leading to the large number of varieties now in existence.

There are approximately 175 plus varieties of chickens grouped into 12 classes and approximately 60 plus breeds. A class is a group of breeds originating in the same geographical area. The names themselves — Asiatic, American, Mediterranean, and so on — indicate the region where the breeds originated.

Breed means a group which possesses a given set of physical features, such as body shape, skin color, carriage or station, and number of toes. Variety is a category of breed and is based on feather color, comb, or other distinctions such as the presence of a beard and muff. Thus, the Plymouth Rock may be Barred, White, Buff, or one of several other colors. The Rhode Island Red may have either a single or rose comb. In each case, the body shape and physical features should be identical.

Chickens are classified by sex and age, too. Cockerel is a male chicken under one year of age; cock is a male more than one year old; pullet is a female under one year, and hen is a female over one year of age. When chicks are first hatched, they may be separated by sexes and are then called sexed chicks. If they have not been separated, they are known as straight-run chicks.

On the next page are some questions that might pop up during your showmanship competitions.

## POSSIBLE SHOWMANSHIP QUESTIONS:

What is the difference between a chicken and other types of birds such as sparrows, cardinals, etc?

- Size?
- Color?
- Bone Structure?
- Comb – Wattles?
- Feather quality and variety?

What breed of chicken is it believed our birds of today were derived from?

- Brahma Pootras
- Red Jungle Fowl
- Rhode Island Reds or Whites?

Classes listed in the APA Standard of Perfection are named under what reasoning?

- Type of breed?
- Colors or Varieties?
- Body type?
- Where they originated?

What is the “normal” respiration rate of a male chicken?

- 14-16 breaths per minute?
- 25-28 breaths per minute?
- 28-31 breaths per minute?
- 18-21 breaths per minute?

How many classes of chickens are in the APA Standard of Perfection?

- 11?
- 15?
- 5?

What does Variety mean?

- The breed of chicken?
- The color of a chicken?
- The type of comb?
- The absence of ear muffs or beards?
- The variety (color) & distinctive features of certain breeds, such as bearded & non-bearded, etc.

What is the term used to describe a group of chicks that have not been sexed.

- Non-sexed?
- Group?
- Sexed?
- Broods?
- Straight run?

What is the normal respiration rate of a hen?

- 18-25 breaths per minute?
- 18-21 breaths per minute?
- 22-31 breaths per minute?
- 31-37 breaths per minute?

What is the normal heart rate of a male chicken “at rest”?

- 238 beats per minute?
- 312 beats per minute?
- 286 beats per minute?

What is the normal heart rate of a female chicken “at rest”?

- 312 beats per minute?
- 226 beats per minute?
- 112 beats per minute?

What is the average temperature of a chicken?

- Male – 105-107 degrees?
- Male – 107-107.5 degrees?
- Female – 107.5-108 degrees?