

Checking Out Chickens

Poultry is a group of domestic fowl that includes chickens, turkey, ducks, ostriches, emus, and geese. These animals are all eaten for their meat. The fowl that we are most familiar with and enjoy in a variety of ways is chicken. We love chicken nuggets with dipping sauces and fried chicken at picnics.

Checking Out Chickens

Just as other animals have special names so do chickens. Male chickens are called roosters. Female chickens are called hens. Baby chickens are called chicks. Chickens raised for their meat are called **broilers** or meat chickens and chickens raised for their eggs are called **layers** or egg chickens.

Chickens have some peculiar parts on their bodies. **Combs** are found on the tops of their heads and **wattles** are found under their beaks. Roosters have larger combs and wattles than hens. Breeds of chickens that come from warmer areas have larger combs and wattles. Another purpose of the comb on a rooster is to attract a hen. There are many breeds of chickens - each with a different appearance due to the color of their feathers and their size.



People often wonder about the difference between white eggs and brown eggs. They both have the same nutritional value and taste. White shelled eggs are produced by hens with white feathers and ear lobes. Brown shelled eggs are produced by hens with red feathers and red ear lobes. Brown and white eggs simply come from two different breeds of chickens. Both are good for you. Layer hens can produce an egg every 24-28 hours.

Chicken Production

There are an enormous number of chickens produced in the Delmarva area. This area includes Delaware, the Eastern shore counties of Maryland, and Virginia. In fact, the number one farm commodity in Maryland is meat (broiler) chickens.



Broiler chickens are young chickens raised for meat. The broiler chicken industry on the Delmarva Peninsula is made up of more than 1,500 farm families who grow nearly 11 million chickens per week.



The production process begins on a breeder farm where breeder hens lay eggs. These eggs are fertilized, collected, selected for quality, and taken to a hatchery. At the hatchery, eggs are placed in incubators where they stay for 21 days until they hatch. Then the new chicks travel to the farm.

On the farm, chicks live in poultry houses where heat and air quality are carefully controlled. The house protects the chickens from disease, predators, and bad weather. Broiler chickens roam about the poultry house and are not kept in cages. Chickens are fed a balanced diet of corn and soybean meal mixed with vitamin and mineral supplements. No hormones are used in feed for chickens. Feed and fresh water are dispensed automatically.

Processing

When broiler chickens grow to a marketable weight (about 6 weeks of age), they are ready for processing. Crews come to the farm, place the chickens in crates, and transport them by truck to a processing plant. At the plant, the chickens are packaged in a variety of ways that are then ready for consumers (like you) at supermarkets, restaurants and school cafeterias.

Each week about 1,000 refrigerated truckloads of chicken are shipped from the Delmarva Peninsula to wholesale, retail, and food service outlets throughout the eastern part of the United States and around the world. Daily, millions of consumers enjoy wholesome, delicious chicken products produced by Delmarva's chicken industry. Check out the diagram below to find out where your favorite chicken part is located on the chicken's body.



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Name: _____



Date: _____

Chickens

Directions: Read each question and fill in the best answer.

1. **Broilers** are chickens raised for

- A. their feathers
- B. their eggs
- C. their meat
- D. their combs

2. Which has a larger comb and wattle?

- A. the hen
- B. the rooster
- C. the chick
- D. all of the above

3. White eggs are better for you than brown eggs because

- A. they have cleaner shells
- B. they have more vitamins
- C. they taste better
- D. none of the above

4. Maryland's number one farm commodity is

- A. brown eggs
- B. meat chickens
- C. white eggs
- D. turkeys

5. A poultry farmer's chicken house protects chickens from

- A. disease
- B. bad weather
- C. predators
- D. all of the above

6. What is a chicken fed in the poultry house?

- A. only corn and soybean meal
- B. soybeans and eggs
- C. corn and soybean meal, vitamins, minerals and water
- D. corn and soybean meal, vitamins, minerals, water, and hormones.

Extended Response:

1. Describe the chicken's wattle and comb, its usefulness, and how it may be different in different climates.
2. Explain the similarities and differences between white eggs and brown eggs.
3. Tell the many ways a farmer cares for the chickens in the poultry house.

Class Survey: Create a questionnaire and poll your class to determine their favorite part of a chicken to eat OR the favorite way they like their chicken prepared.

Chicken Facts and Trivia



- There are more chickens on Earth than there are humans.
- Americans consume 8 Billion chickens a year.
- Most of the grain grown on Maryland's Eastern Shore is used for chicken feed.
- The following Maryland counties were among the leaders in broiler chicken production in America - Somerset #25, Worcester #26, Wicomico #36, Caroline #40, and Dorchester #63.
- Approximately 40% of Maryland's cash farm income was from meat chickens in 2010.
- In Gainesville, Georgia (the chicken capital of the world), a local ordinance makes it illegal to eat your chicken with a fork.
- There are over 150 domestic breeds of chickens.
- In 1979, the world record was set by a white Leghorn breed chicken that laid 371 eggs in 364 days.
- The average number of eggs laid by a chicken in one year is 260.

A Fun Science Activity for You to TRY...



Turning Chicken Bones into Rubber

Materials needed:

- Large glass jar
- Vinegar
- Chicken bone (drumstick works well) with meat washed off

Procedure

1. Check out the bone by trying to bend it. How does it feel? The stiffness in the bone comes from the calcium that makes it firm.
2. Place washed chicken bone in jar
3. Cover with vinegar. Cover with lid.
4. Let it sit for several days.
5. Remove the bone from the jar. How does it feel now?
6. Is it rubbery or bendable?



What happened? The vinegar acts like a mild acid and dissolves the calcium in the bone. The bone without calcium becomes rubbery and bendable. To be hard your bones need to have calcium. That is probably why your parents always tell you to drink your milk...because milk has the calcium necessary to build strong bones.

Turn this into a Science Fair Experiment:

1. Try different kinds of vinegar. Which works best?
2. Try different sizes of bones. Which works best?
3. Try differing amounts of time? Does it make a difference?



Check Out These Books



Chicken by Rachael Bell, Chicago, IL. Heinemann Library 2000

Life on a Chicken Farm by Judy Wolfman, Carolrhoda books, 2004

Extraordinary Chickens by Harriet Whelchel, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2000

The Painter Who Loved Chickens by Oliver Dunrea, Farrar Straus Giroux 1995



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