



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## Selecting Chickens for Show<sup>1</sup>

Jacqueline P. Jacob and F. Ben Mather<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of factors which judges take into account when evaluating chickens in a poultry show. Some of these will be discussed. In selecting chickens for show it is important to look at the bird as a whole. Judges are looking for a good overall bird -- and not ones that are good in only one or two features.

Chickens can be entered in either the production (commercial) or purebred (exhibition) category. Male and female White Leghorns, Rhode Island Red, White Plymouth Rock, Barred Plymouth Rock, as well as female black or red sex-links are eligible for entry in the production category.

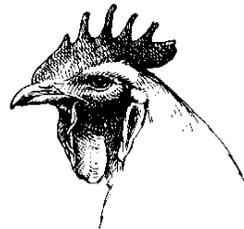
For information on preparing poultry for show, refer to Fact Sheet PS-34, "Preparing Poultry for Show".

### PRODUCTION

Hens in the production category are judged on their past and current laying condition. The emphasis for selection, therefore, is based mainly on body conformation and sexual maturity, with some consideration given to head, feathering, feet, and toes. You should look for certain characteristics and qualities when selecting birds for show.

### Head

The head should be broad and somewhat flat on top rather than round, wide between the eyes, and moderately long. Figure 1 shows an undesirable type of single-comb head. It is narrow, shallow and over-refined. This is referred to as a "crow head".



**Figure 1.**  
Undesirable head type  
(crow head).

The face should be clean cut, smooth, and wrinkle-free. The skin should be fine-grained and soft in texture, the comb substantial in size and rich in color. The eyes should be large and bright with the irises a rich reddish bay color, and the pupils distinctly round.

### Body Conformation

The body should be broad, deep, and well-developed. This is important for adequate intestinal development, which is needed for quick digestion and absorption of food necessary for good egg production. Body depth can be determined by placing your finger tips on the back bone and your thumb across the middle of the keel (breastbone).

1. This document is FACT SHEET PS-33, one of a series of the Dairy and Poultry Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First printed November 1997. Please visit the FAIRS Web site at <http://hammock.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Jacqueline P. Jacob, poultry extension coordinator, and F. Ben Mather, poultry extension specialist, Dairy and Poultry Sciences Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. For information on obtaining other extension publications, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office. Florida Cooperative Extension Service / Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences/University of Florida / Christine Taylor Waddill, Dean

**Feathering**

The birds should be fully feathered with the plumage in good condition.

**Feet and Toes**

The bird should be well balanced on its legs. The feet and toes should be normal.

**Sexual Maturity**

The comb, wattles, and earlobes should be well-developed. Hens should be in egg production.

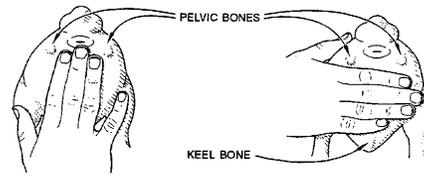
**Females**

Female chickens entered in the production category are judged on the basis of the ability to produce eggs -- in the past or currently. It is relatively easy to determine whether or not a hen is in egg production. Check the condition of the comb, pubic bones, abdomen, and vent. If a hen is laying, her comb and wattles should be large, red, soft, and waxy. The pubic bones should be thin, flexible and wide apart. The abdomen should be full, soft and pliable. The vent should be large, moist and free of pigment. A good layer should have more than a two-finger width between the pubic bones (also referred to as pelvic bones) and a three or more finger width between the pubic bones and the tip of the keel (abdominal capacity; see Figure 2).

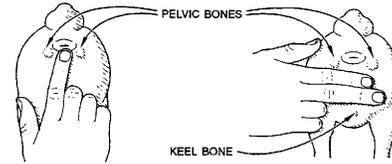
When a hen is not in egg production, her comb and wattles may be small, pale, and shriveled. The pubic bones are rigid and close together. The abdomen is hard and tight, and the vent is small, dry and pigmented. Do not confuse a fatty abdomen with one that is soft and pliable due to laying conditions. See Table 1 for a comparison of a good and poor layer. Refer to Figure 2 and Figure 3 for the parts of the chicken.

**Males**

Male chickens entered in the production category are judged on the basis of physical condition, alertness and activity. Sex-link males will only receive a white ribbon because they are crossbreds and are not used for breeding purposes.



A 3 fingers' width x 4 fingers' width indicates excellent abdominal capacity.

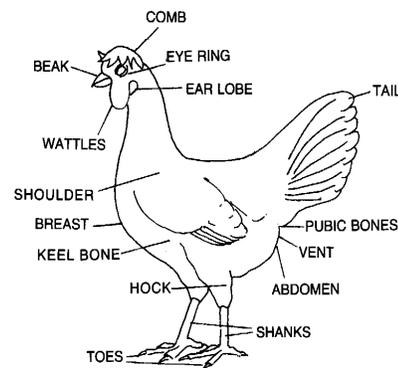


A 1 finger's width x 2 fingers' width indicates poor abdominal capacity.

**Figure 2.** Measuring abdominal capacity (feathers removed for illustration purposes).

**Table 1.** Comparison of good and poor layers.

Body part	Good layer	Poor layer
<b>Carriage</b>	active, alert	lazy, listless
<b>Eyes</b>	bright, sparkling	dull, sunken
<b>Combs/Wattles</b>	large, bright	small, pale
<b>Shanks</b>	thin, flat	round, full
<b>Back</b>	wide	narrow, tapered
<b>Abdomen</b>	deep, soft	shallow, hard
<b>Pubic bones</b>	wide apart, thin flexible	tight, stiff, thick
<b>Vent</b>	large, moist	puckered, dry



**Figure 3.** Parts of the chicken.

## PUREBRED

Before selecting purebred chickens to enter in a poultry show, it is important to become familiar with the criteria for your particular breed, as set out in the American Poultry Association's Standard of Perfection. The chickens, both male and female, will be judged on their conformance to these standards in terms of body weight, shape or type, color of plumage, color of shanks and skin, color of earlobes, and shape or type of comb (see Figure 4 for some of the types of combs).

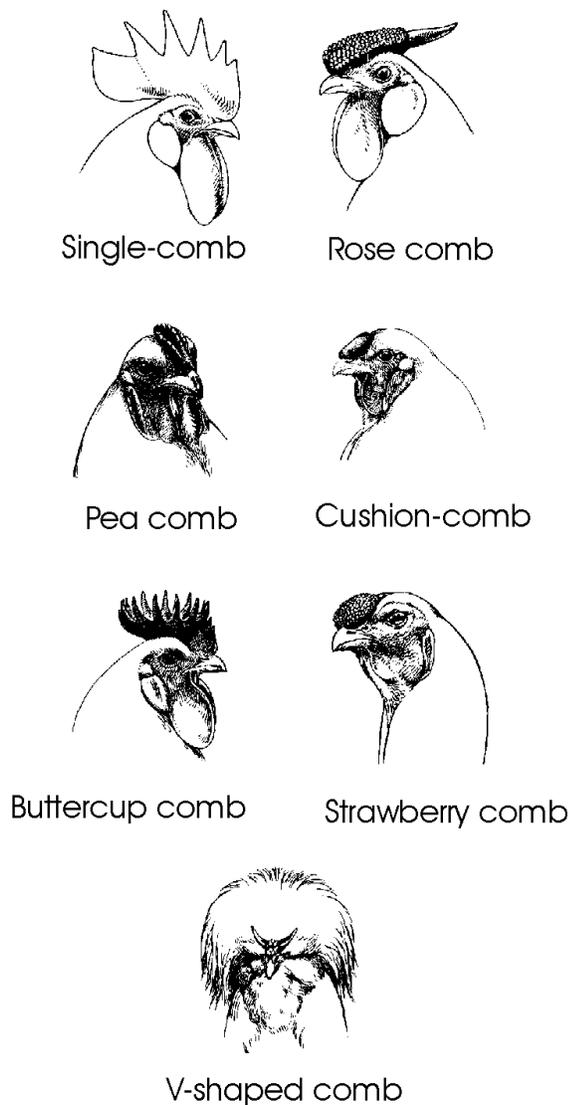


Figure 4. Different comb types.

Purchase high quality birds. If you produce your own stock, look for outstanding individuals in the flock when your chickens are in the growing phase. Use plastic leg bands to identify the best birds.

After selecting birds which are in good physical condition, are not blind, and conform to the standards for their breed and variety, conduct a more careful inspection for disqualifications and defects. Some undesirable characteristics are:

**Tail:** Split tail, wry tail, squirrel tail, and entire absence of main tail feathers. Some tail disqualifications are shown in Figure 5.

**Wings:** Slipped wing, split wing, and clipped wing. Some wing disqualifications are shown in Figure 6.

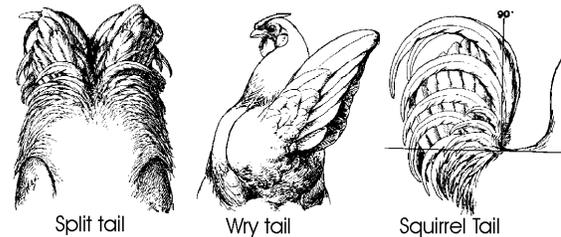


Figure 5. Examples of some disqualifications involving the tail.

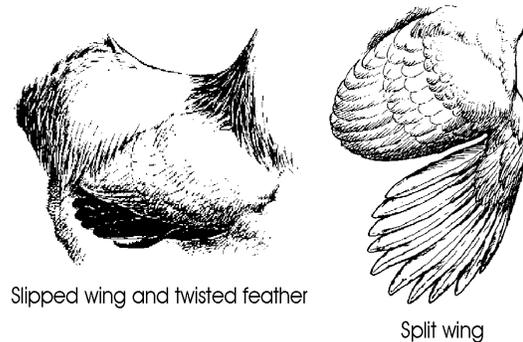


Figure 6. Examples of disqualifications involving the wing.

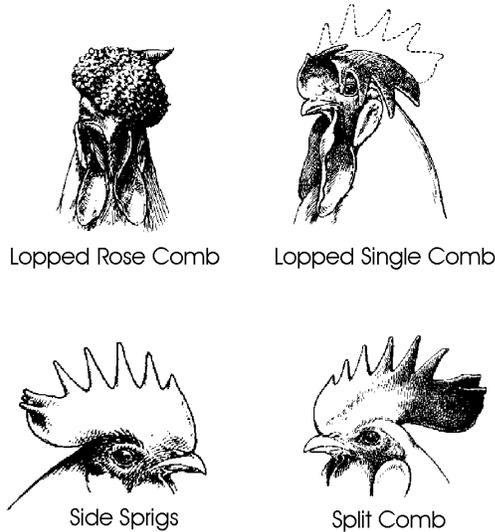
**Back:** Crooked or hunchback.

**Beak:** Deformed.

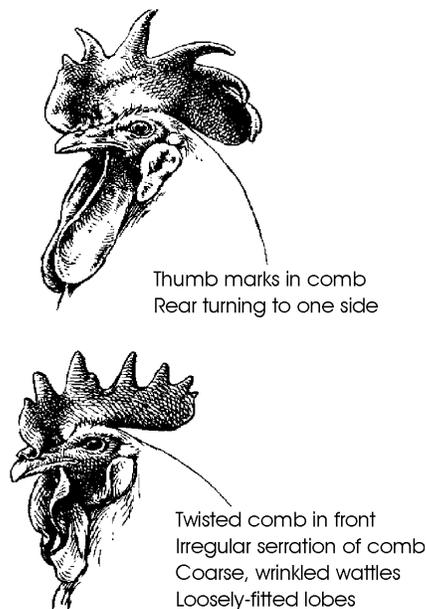
**Feathers:** Twisted feathers in primaries, secondaries, main tail feathers, and sickles.

**Weights:** More than 2 lbs under standard weight, except Leghorns and Anconas, where it is more than 1½ lbs underweight for males and more than 1 lb underweight for females.

**Comb:** A comb foreign to the breed or variety. Absence of spikes on rose comb (see Figure 3 for typical rose comb). Some comb disqualifications are shown in Figure 7, including split single comb, side sprigs on single comb, and lopped comb (except on females of Mediterraneans, New Hampshire, and some rare breeds). Some comb defects are shown in Figure 8.



**Figure 7.** Examples of disqualifications involving the comb.



**Figure 8.** Some comb defects.

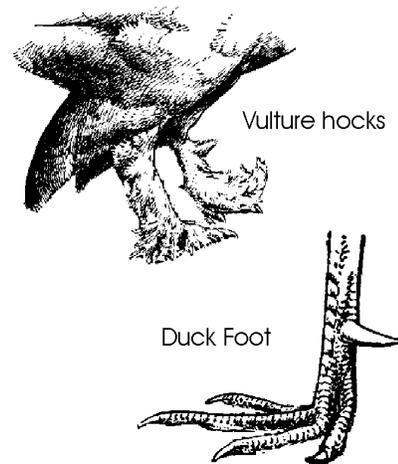
**Head and Adjuncts:** Enamel white in the face of young Mediterraneans, and enamel white in the earlobes of common breeds of the American, Asiatic, and English classes. Red in the earlobes of some breeds.

**Shanks and Toes:** Decidedly bowlegs or knock-knees. Stubs or down on shanks or toes of all clean shank breeds. Entire absence of spurs on cocks. More or less than the required number of toes. Color of shanks, toes or feet foreign to the breed. Vulture hocks (except in Sultans and some breeds of feather-legged Bantams) and duck foot (see Figure 9).

**Color:** Red or yellow in any black variety. Black in quill of white varieties. Foreign color in any white variety.

**General:** poor physical condition, disease or deformity.

There are also specific disqualifications for each breed and variety. Refer to the American Poultry Association's Standard of Perfection for details regarding the birds you have.



**Figure 9.** Some disqualifications involving the legs.