

Delaware Chicken Breed Guide



**Breed type**

Dual-purpose (egg and meat),
ornamental

**Egg color**

Light brown

**Pen or free-range?**

Both

**Temperament**

Mostly calm and
friendly, assertive

Delaware quick facts

Lifespan: 5-8 years

Weight: Females (hens): 5.5-6.5 lbs.; Males (roosters): 7.5-8.5 lbs..

Appearance: White with black barring

Egg Production: 250-280 eggs/year (4 eggs/week)

Good for Beginners: Yes

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Interest in **Delaware chickens** is growing after years of decline as more keepers recognize the beauty and utility of this breed. At Tractor Supply, we offer numerous **poultry breeds** and leverage our 85+ years of experience to help you enjoy Life Out Here. Learn more about Delaware chickens and why you should consider adding them to your flock.

History of Delaware Chickens

The origins of Delaware chickens stem back to the 1940s with George Ellis, the owner of Indian River Hatchery in Ocean View, Delaware. Ellis wanted to create a breed with good egg-laying abilities and ideal for broiling. So, he crossed **Barred Plymouth Rocks** and New Hampshire chickens to develop Silver Sports. As the name suggests, these chickens had a silver color, although some were white with light barring – like the Columbian color pattern.

Ellis partnered with Edmund Hoffman, who worked at Indian River Hatchery and was also a student at the University of Delaware studying poultry. Together, they developed a new breed by crossing the Columbian-colored offspring. This led to a new breed called the Indian River, which later became the Delaware. In 1952, the American Poultry Association (APA) standardized Delaware chickens.

A Delaware chicken's mostly white feathers proved advantageous for the local broiler industry. White feathers don't leave dark spots on the skin when they grow, leaving an appealing body for meat. However, their popularity declined with the introduction of the **Cornish Cross**, which took over the broiler industry. Additionally, Delaware chickens weren't known well outside of broiling, so many farms and homesteads weren't aware of the breed.

Delaware chickens don't have the same economic relevance they once had, but more keepers are considering them as they realize the benefits of this breed. This dual-purpose bird is low maintenance and has a personality perfect for any flock.

Temperament and Good-to-Knows

There are many reasons to consider Delaware chickens when **starting your flock** or adding new breeds to an existing one. In addition to providing meat, Delaware chickens are also great egg layers and may even be shown at exhibitions. Here are some good things to know before introducing Delaware chickens to your flock:

- **Friendly but not cuddly:** Delaware chickens are docile and friendly. They're not a cuddly breed but often follow their keepers around.
- **Talkative birds:** This breed can be loud, so might not be the best for a backyard keeper with neighbors close by.
- **Assertive but not overly aggressive:** If adding Delaware chickens to an existing flock, know they're independent but generally not confrontational with other chickens. Conversely, they tend to avoid conflict.
- **Active foragers:** Delaware chickens make great free-range birds because they love to forage and explore. That said, they also don't mind confinement.
- **Predator-savvy:** White feathering typically puts a target on the backs of chickens, but Delawares are highly aware of predators. In some cases, they might fight back.
- **Not reliable to brood:** Although some Delaware hens might go broody, it's rare. Their active nature often means they don't have the patience to sit in a nest. So, if your hens go broody, consider incubators in case they leave the nest.

Visual and Egg Characteristics

Crossbreeding has created a unique bird with distinct physical characteristics and favorable egg-laying capabilities. Consider these traits of Delaware chickens:

Physical Characteristics of Delaware Chickens

Delaware chickens don't come in as many color varieties as other breeds, but they don't need to. Their bright white feathers and the black barring on their hackles and tail feathers make them stand out. They have yellow skin and legs and red single combs.

Developed for meat production, these birds have medium bodies with broad, deep chests. They have long keels that extend to the front near the breast and rear of the legs. Large and muscular, their legs

are set apart, giving Delawares an upright appearance. Hens weigh between 5.5 and 6.5 pounds, and roosters weigh between 7.5 and 8.5 pounds.

Delaware Egg Production

At one point, Delaware chickens laid a modest number of eggs – about 100-150 a year. Today, this breed has become a superbreed, producing between 250-280 eggs per year. This is about four eggs a week. Delaware hens can begin laying around 16 weeks and lay large/jumbo-sized light brown eggs.

Often, keepers seek Delaware chickens bred specifically for egg laying, whose secondary purpose is for meat. Similarly, some Delawares might be primarily bred for meat and lay fewer eggs. So, ask the hatchery about the strain before purchasing to find the best birds for your goals.

Health and Care

Another reason to add Delaware chickens to your flock is their minimal care needs. Still, proper care is essential for safeguarding the **health and wellness** of your chickens. Practice these tips to ensure their well-being:

- **Supplement foraging with high-quality feed:** As mentioned, Delaware chickens are known as great foragers. They could feed themselves through foraging, but if you want to accelerate their development and optimize their health, provide a free choice **poultry feed** to supplement foraging.
- **Secure coop and plenty of run space:** Like other breeds, Delawares require secure **coops and pens** to protect them against predators. If you must keep your Delaware chickens confined, provide ample run space for exercising and foraging.
- **Possible health complications:** The Delaware is a healthy breed. For instance, they don't have the circulatory or lung problems associated with other hybrid meat chickens. However, as a fast-maturing breed, they can experience health issues later in life, particularly those bred for meat.
- **Challenges with feathers:** Feather quality depends on the purpose of breeding the strain of Delaware chickens. Since meat birds have light feathering for easier picking during processing, it's not uncommon for them to be bare in areas. These birds will likely require more heat and cold protection. If keeping these chickens as pets or for eggs, explore strains for these purposes, which often have higher quality feathers.
- **Hardiness in different climates:** Delawares are more heat tolerant than cold tolerant. Still, they can become susceptible to heat stress, so ensure there is plenty of shade in the run and regularly refill **waterers** so your birds stay hydrated. **Coop heaters** and similar accessories can keep them warm in the winter.

Find What Your Flock Needs at Tractor Supply

From meat and egg production to exhibition, there are several reasons to add Delaware chickens to your flock. If you want to learn more about these or other **chicken breeds**, trust America's largest rural lifestyle retailer, Tractor Supply. In addition to live birds and poultry supplies, we educate customers about **how to care for chickens** and more in **The Coop**. Shop online for Delaware chickens or **visit your local Tractor Supply store**.