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Anyone For A Few Geese

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

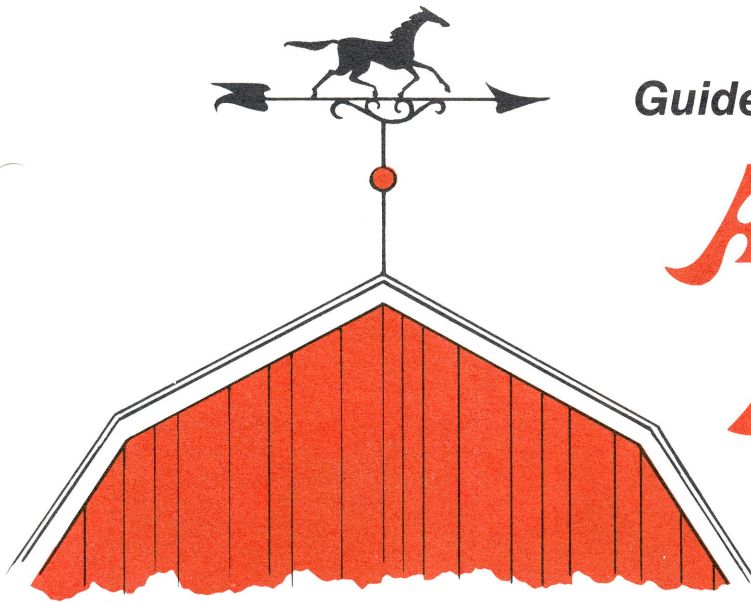
C.C. Sheppard, B.J. Marquez, Sam K. Varghese, Poultry

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FARMING KNOW-HOW

Guidelines to Better Family Farming

Anyone for a Few Geese?

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
Michigan State University

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SO YOU WANT to keep a few geese—but don't know where to start? Let's start with some little-known facts: (1) geese are easy to raise; (2) they grow rapidly; (3) geese do not require much expensive feed; (4) they are highly disease resistant. How is that for a few good points for starters? Geese can create one problem if allowed to do so by their owners: they can be dirty if confined to a very small area.

What Breed of Goose?

What size of goose do you want? Five breeds are available. The following table gives some indication of the size and color as well as the names of the five breeds.

Common Breeds of Geese (including size and color)

Breed	Adult Size (weight in pounds)		Color
	Male	Female	
Toulouse	26	20	Dark gray with white abdomen. Dewlap* present.
Embden	26	20	White.
African	20	18	Gray with brown shade (has a knob on its beak). Adults have a dewlap.
Pilgrim	14	13	Male white, female gray and white.
Chinese	12	10	White or brown (has a knob on its beak).

* A dewlap is a fold of skin that hangs down from the throat at the upper or head end of the neck.

If you wish to raise the birds as a hobby, the choice of breed is really one of your fancy. If you are raising them for a market, you are raising for someone else's fancy. Generally, people who buy geese for the consumers' market want birds that are large, young and generally white feathered. Probably the most popular breeds for marketing are Toulouse and Embden.

Where Are They?

Very little research has been done with geese, especially in selective breeding. Most of the geese in the United States are raised in the west North Central States. According to the past U. S. census reports, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North and South Dakota have been leaders (with much fluctuation) in goose production with Washington, California, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania also raising and selling some geese.

If you want to buy a few goslings, your county Extension office may know of someone in your area who keeps geese. These growers may have goslings to sell or may know where you can obtain them. If you cannot locate them in this manner, a note to the Poultry Extension Office, 113 Anthony Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, may help you in locating some goslings.

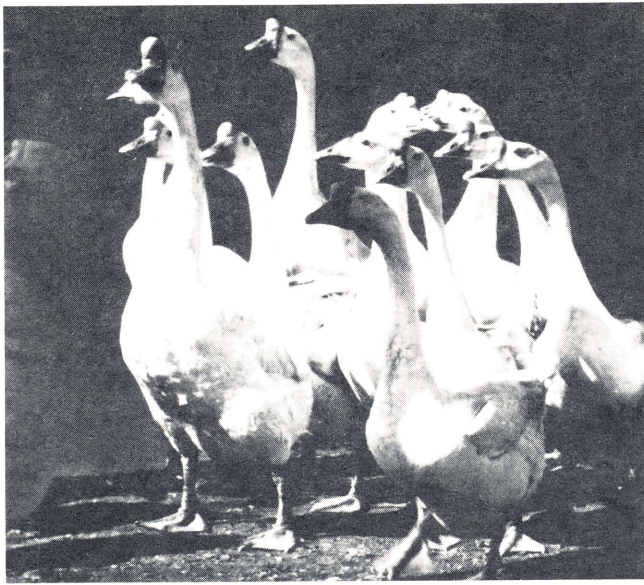
Goslings — Care and Feeding

You have obtained some real live goslings, a day or two days old—aren't they cute! Now the care starts. Questions, questions, questions! What do they eat? How much heat? How often do I—? What kind of housing? Etcetera. Etcetera!

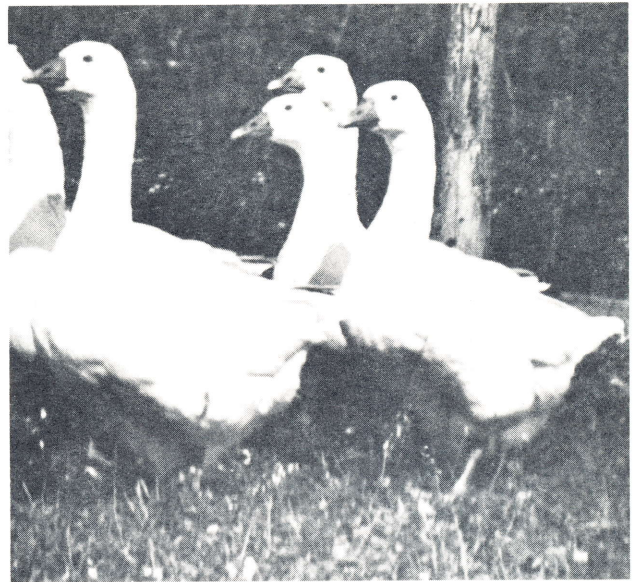
First, order goslings to arrive in the late spring or early summer (late May or June). The birds require much less care at that time of year as the weather is more favorable than earlier. Goslings require a warm dry place for one to four weeks, depending upon the weather.

Heat

An area six feet by eight feet will house ten young goslings nicely. Very young birds need to be kept free from drafts, wet and cold. A 250-watt heat lamp (the type used for young chickens and young pigs) suspended 15 to 18 inches from the floor will provide plenty of heat. You can test the heat at the floor level by putting your hand on the floor directly under the lamp. If it is too hot for your hand, it is too



Chinese geese.



Emden geese.

hot for young geese. However, it should be warm enough for the birds to be comfortable without piling up on top of each other.

Goslings will move away from a draft but they will be evenly distributed on the floor in a ring around the heat lamp if they are comfortable. If drafts are a problem, a shield or corral of chicken wire covered with newspaper, or one of cardboard, will stop drafts. The corral should be at least 12 inches high and 4 to 5 feet in diameter. Another purpose of the corral is to teach the goslings where mother (the heat lamp) is—they do not know that the lamp is mother, and it will not talk to them.

Litter

The pen should be covered with litter such as straw (chopped straw is better than long straw), sawdust, shavings and crushed corn cobs. The litter material must be dry and must be capable of absorbing moisture, as geese tend to mess in the waterers. Keeping birds out of the waterers will help keep clean floors. They also tend to produce wet manure, so a litter material capable of absorbing moisture is a necessity.

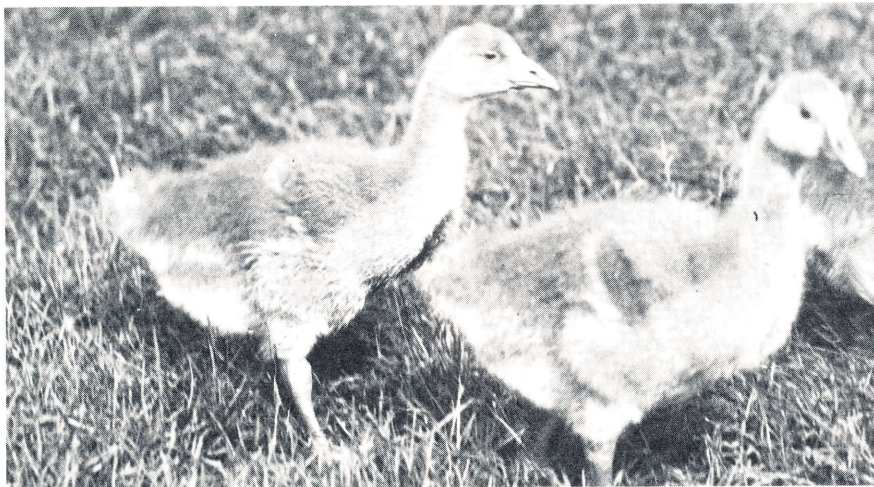
The pen should be covered with a rough paper for the first four or five days. The paper prevents the goslings from eating the litter material. As soon as they find the feed and water they will not eat the litter.

The paper should be removed at least by the 5th day. Be sure that the paper is rough, as smooth slippery paper produces spraddled legs. This means that the leg dislocates from the socket where it attaches to the body. The spraddle-legged gosling almost never recovers, and is a complete loss.

Feeding Goslings

A feed for starting goslings should be 20 to 24% protein. If you can't find any kind of goose feed at the feed store, you can feed the birds baby chick starter or a duck or waterfowl starter feed. Give them all they want, **at all times** for the first three to four weeks of age. Keep the birds out of the feeders to keep feed from being wasted. Chick starters may result in leg trouble for the young goslings; because they grow so much more rapidly than chicks, their food requirements are different. This is why they must get outside to forage.

If at all possible (if it is warm and not raining) get the young goslings outside during the daytime. They need this opportunity to pick up some bugs and grass to help properly balance their ration. Very young goslings should not be left out in the rain because they become waterlogged: their down soaks up water, and their tiny legs can't sup-



Toulouse goslings, one month old.

port the added weight. Some say they have "drowned"! After they develop feathers, waterlogging is no problem.

In spite of the fact that there has been no selective breeding done with geese, they do grow more rapidly than most other birds. It is not unusual for them to weigh 10 pounds in 10 weeks on commercial feeds.

In the late 1940s, E. L. Dakin of the Poultry Science Department, Ohio State University, kept a flock of 200-300 adult geese. After starting the goslings for three to four weeks on chick starter and grass, he turned the birds out to a blue-grass pasture that was at least six to eight inches long. He also made sure that the birds had clean water and whole or very coarsely cracked corn feed for energy. The grass, bugs and soil provided necessary protein, minerals and vitamins. These birds did not grow as rapidly as they would have on a well-balanced commercial feed; however, the feed cost was relatively low. (If you wish to try this way of feeding your geese, an evening feeding of a little mash or three weeks of cracked corn and starter mash mixed together in equal parts will make the shift to the pasture and corn diet easier.)

Geese will eat a lot of grass, and are sometimes used to weed crops



Toulouse geese.

like strawberries, asparagus and sugar beets, as well as orchards, because they will eat most weeds. When strawberries start to ripen, however, geese should be moved out of the patch so they will not eat or ruin the ripe berries. Older geese may damage the crop by walking on the plants. Drinking water should also be available to keep the young geese cool. The birds will do a better job of weeding if they are hungry—a very light evening

feeding of grain (whole corn) is sufficient.

Breeder Geese

Young females (approximately one year old) will lay eggs. They will produce better the second and third year. Numbers of eggs will vary widely per female—from 10 to 60 eggs per season. In the northern part of the United States a flock will start to lay eggs in late March and stop in June. You can induce

A Goose for the Holiday Feast?

A Goose for the Holiday?

How do you kill and dress a goose? Tie the legs firmly together and hang the bird over a rafter in the garage or over a tree limb. With the feet up in the air and the head down at waist level or higher you must cut the jugular veins. There is a jugular vein down each side of the neck. It is common for the bird to flop its wings, so you may want to confine its body in a burlap bag.

Dunk the bird immediately after it stops flopping into hot (145-160°F.) water for one to two minutes. It would be well to add some detergent to the water in order for the hot water to more easily penetrate the oil on the feathers. It may help to ruffle the feathers with a stick (hold on to the feet with one

hand and stir the feathers with a stick in the other hand).

Removing the feathers can be difficult for the inexperienced. Success will come with time and practice. Hang the bird up again, grab feathers, and start pulling! Don't grab too many feathers at one time or the skin may tear. There are a lot of down feathers—and there may be some pin feathers. It might be smart to dip the bird a second time after some of the outer feathers have been removed. With persistence you will get the bird picked.

Ready to Cook!

To prepare the bird for cooking:

1. Cut off its head and feet.
2. Lay the bird on its back.
3. Cut a hole in the abdomen

(around the vent) and remove the viscera (intestines, heart, liver, gizzard, lungs, etc.). Be sure that the intestinal cavity is clean—wash it.

4. Turn the bird on its breast. Slit the neck skin from the head end to about even with the point at which the wings join the body. Peel the skin off of the neck and remove the neck at its base.

5. Remove the windpipe and esophagus (connection between beak and stomach) from either the neck or the neck skin. Both of these tubes should also come free from the inside of the bird.

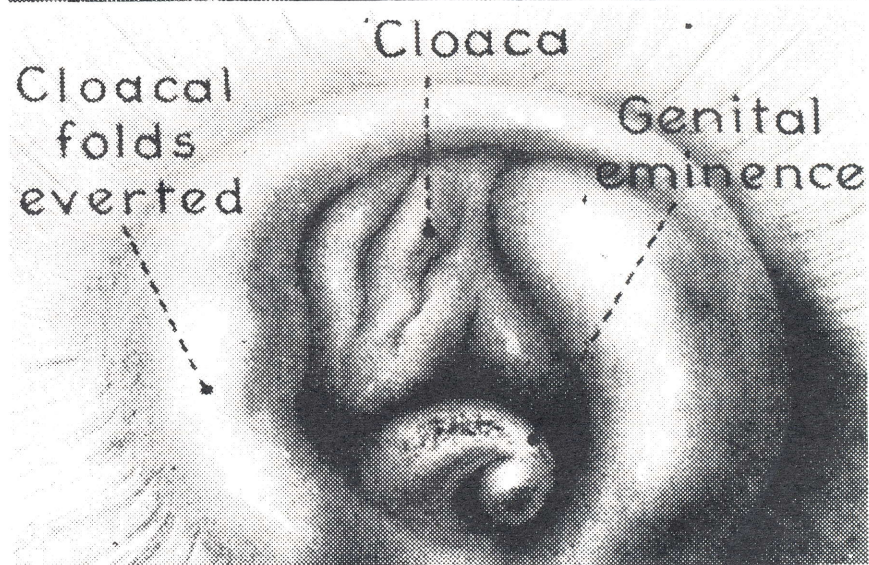
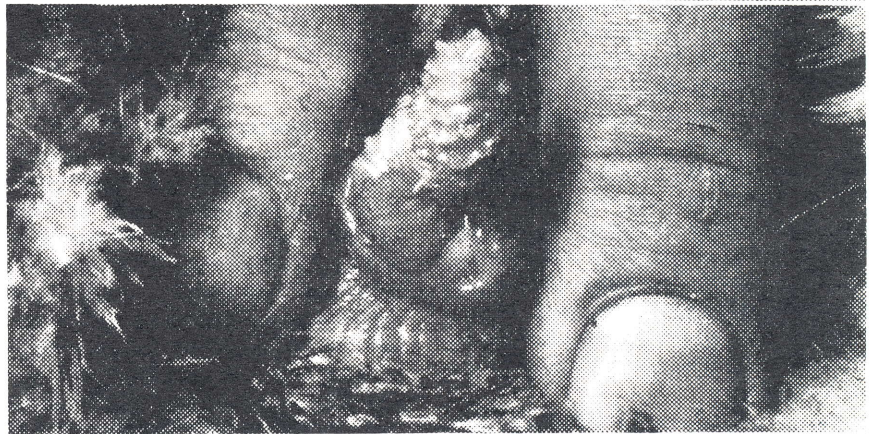
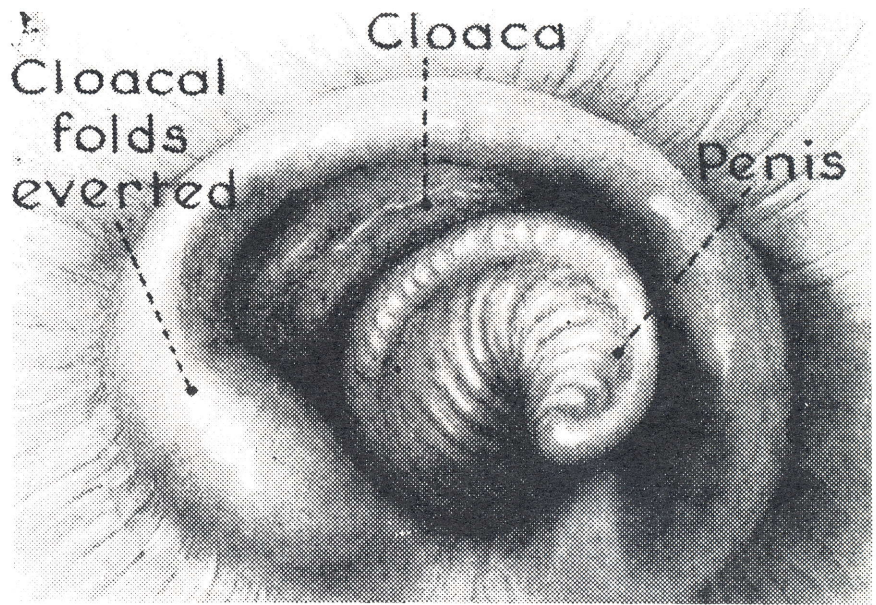
6. Clean up the heart, liver and gizzard, and the bird is ready to cook.

females to lay eggs during the winter by allowing a total of 15 hours of light (daylight and incandescent). The females will begin producing eggs in about 30 days after lighting them. For your small breeder flock, a pelleted chicken breeder or layer mash will be adequate, if the birds have access to the outside.

The ganders (males) will be much more active and better breeders after the first year of age. Geese can be very selective of mates. Many large flocks use one gander to three to five females. You may run into fertility problems with a flock of two ganders and five to ten geese. It may be necessary to have several ganders available so that each female can select one that suits her.

Determining Sex of Geese

It is helpful to know how to determine the sex of geese, and you can do this using a technique called "vent sexing." Start with geese that are at least two years old. When lifting geese, grab them by the neck (it is strong and you will not choke them) with one hand and lift their body with the other hand. Lay the bird on its back with the head held between your legs. The vent or cloaca will be pointing away from you. You must extend the tail of the bird out over the edge of the table. Bend the tail head down over the table edge and apply pressure on the sides of the vent and side towards you. Some people use vasoline on their finger (a rubber glove may be used), which is then inserted into the vent a half to three quarters of an inch. Rotating the finger in a circular motion will tend to relax the muscle that surrounds the vent. The penis (after you learn how to sex geese) in a two-year-old male will extend two to three inches and will have a corkscrew appearance. The penis in a six-month-old gander will look like the end of an earth worm, and is about three-eighths of an inch long. The vent sexing technique is not difficult—but you do need practice. The females have a genital eminence in the vent. It is small and not easily confused with the male—after a little practice.



Reproductive organs of (TOP) immature male; (CENTER) mature male; (BOTTOM) genital eminence of maturing female.