

## **What to Expect at Your First Poultry Show**

*by Laura Haggarty*

Going to your first poultry show can be exciting, but somewhat nerve-wracking. What am I supposed to do? How do I “show” a chicken anyway? Where do I go, and when? What do I do when I get there? What will the judge do/say/think about my birds?

Believe me, it seems complicated at first, but it’s really easy once you know the routine, and a lot of fun! Chicken people are great to show with, and chicken shows are much easier than almost any other kind of animal show. All you have to do is get your bird in the cage, the judges and clerks do the rest. But there’s a lot of preparation to do beforehand, and in this article I’ll try to walk you through what you need to do.

A lot of what you have to do before a show is prep work and it has to start long before the show itself. See my article on the site about Show Prep, which covers most of it.

Once you’ve gotten your birds conditioned and prepped, there are some things you need to do. The first is to determine the date and location of the show you want to attend. An easy way to find out info about poultry shows is to subscribe to *The Poultry Press*, which is the monthly newspaper about the exhibition poultry fancy. It’s a great resource for show info, as well as informative articles about poultry husbandry. There are also some great groups on Facebook with lots of people more than willing to help get you started.

Once you figure out which show you want to go to, you need to obtain an entry form and/or show catalogue. The entry form is key, you need to fill it out fully and have it back well before the deadline so that the show secretary can determine how many birds will be at the show, and make cage cards for them all. See my other article on the site for how to fill out an entry form.

So let’s say you’ve filled in your entry form, sent it off, and it’s the day before the show. Some shows are one-day shows; others are two-day shows. For a two-day show you might want to consider making a hotel reservation (for larger shows it’s important to do this well in advance, as hotels can get filled up quickly!) For a one-day show you might want to drive there early the day of, but be sure to leave yourself plenty of time to “coop in” your birds (put them in their cages and ensure they are ready to show.)

Before you leave, be sure to grab your health forms. Most poultry shows require entrants to be tested for Pullorum/Typhoid, and some require testing for Avian Influenza as well. That info will be in the show catalogue. Most states have a testing program (which varies from state to state), which will fall under the State Veterinarian’s Office. You will need to call your State Vet several weeks to a month before the show date to find out what you have to do to have your birds blood tested before the show. Once you’ve had that done the paperwork is usually good for between 30 to 90 days, so should serve you for the upcoming shows.

Ok, you’ve got your paperwork done (entries, health forms), got your birds prepped and packed up, and are off to the show. Once you arrive, what then? First thing to do is check in with the show secretary. They will have a list of exhibitors, each with their own number. This number

will tell you where to put your birds. Figure out your number, and then go and find your cages. Cages are set up according to Classes (American, Continental, English etc. for Large Fowl; Single Comb Clean Legged, Feather Legged and so on for Bantams.) Once you find the Class in which your bird belongs, you'll see the Breeds (Dutch Bantam, Silkie, Buckeye, and so on.) Breeds are broken down further by gender: Cock, Hen, Cockerel, Pullet. So look for the cages that have your number on them, in the genders and breeds and classes for each of your birds. Note that some shows require leg bands on each bird, and put the leg band number on the specific cage; others just designate exhibitor numbers and let you decide in which cage to put your specific bird.

Once you've figured out which cages to put your birds into, there are a couple of things to do before you pop them in there. You might want to make sure there are enough shavings in each cage, most shows are very generous with shavings, but it isn't a bad idea to bring a bale of your own just in case you'd like to put some more in (especially important for feather legged breeds.) You will see water cups in each cage, and again, it's a good idea to bring some extras just in case, as you may wish to put feed in one cup (rather than scatter it on the floor) and water in another, which is more important for two-day shows than one-day shows.

Note that its best not to give birds too much food to eat before showing, having a full crop ruins the look of a sleek, show-ready bird. So hold off on food before judging at a one day show, and give small amounts the night before a two-day show. I like to bring scratch (which is different than regular feed) to feed the evening before a show. It results in firmer feces, which means less staining of your clean bird. Either way, bringing your own food and water is always a good idea, just in case.

Some caveats about cooping in: it is considered bad form (and against ABA/APA rules) to enhance the cages your birds are in so as to distinguish your birds from other people's birds. So don't write your name on any cage cups, don't put up opaque barriers between your birds and those next to them (clear plastic can be used, but it's important that the judge can look down the aisle and see all the birds.) As well, it is never ok to bring birds that are sick or have parasites to a show, it's not fair to other exhibitors, and you may wind up having to remove your birds and go home if the show superintendent or judges discover it.

Once your cages are set up, take each bird out and look it over before putting it in the cage. You may want to check its feet for dirt, give its feathers a going over with a clean cloth (some folks use silk to shine their birds up well), inspect its eyes and nose and beak and toenails and vent to be sure everything is perfect before judging. Then when you're sure the bird is ready to go, pop it in the cage, and go onto the next. When all the birds are cooped in and watered, your work for now is done! Go find a cup of coffee or a cold drink, introduce yourself to some other exhibitors (most poultry show people are very nice and welcoming to new exhibitors), and find a place to sit. For now until judging is done, there's nothing else for you to do. Most judges prefer that exhibitors stay clear of the aisles in which they are judging, so as not to distract them. If you like you can "cage hang" and peer at the judge from the next aisle over, but best to do so discretely if you feel you must.

Once the judging is done, you can go back over to your cage and see how you've done. Reading a cage card can seem confusing at first, I've written two whole articles on what the markings mean, you can see them on this website as well.

With luck, you've won something wonderful! Awards and trophies are given out at the end of the show, and if you've won a big one, your exhibitor name will be called out and you can go up and collect your winnings. But even if you didn't win the first time, don't be disappointed, it's a learning experience, and with luck you've met some other people who work with the breeds you do, and asked them questions and looked at their birds. Breeding good birds to win shows with takes time, and practice, and hatching a lot of birds! Once you win that first trophy it will make the hard work feel like it was all worthwhile. And in the meantime, you'll have fun learning and showing. Best of luck to you, and may all your birds be healthy!

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