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## Domestic Duck and Goose Care Sheet

**Diet:** Ducks/geese should have these available FRESH daily: NON-medicated duck pellets (try Mazuri brand ([www.mazuri.com](http://www.mazuri.com)) by Purina. This high quality feed can be ordered through most feed stores), NON-medicated poultry scratch. Scratch is a mixture of cracked corn, millet, wheat and other seeds. This food can usually be purchased bulk or in bags. Don't buy large quantities of food if you only have a small number of birds. Food should be under cover so that it does not get rained/snowed on.

Fresh water should be available at all times, and placed close to feed so that birds have the option to drink while eating. A.S.K. uses large plastic water bowls like this: <http://www.tractorsupply.com/livestock/livestock-buckets-tubs/livestock-feeders/fortex-round-feeder-1-gal-capacity-black-2171360>

**Warning:** Damp/moldy feed can cause serious, life-threatening respiratory illness to birds, like aspergillosis. Dispose of old food where your birds cannot access it and store food in secure plastic (not metal) containers where moisture is not an issue. *Chicken* feeds are often medicated; avoid feeding ducks/geese medicated feeds.

### Supplemental Foods (not exhaustive):

- Fresh turnip/collard/kale greens, ripped apart.
- Brussel sprout greens, chopped raw brussel sprouts
- Cucumber, cut half-wise
- Melons, any variety
- Tomatoes, cracked open (tomato *leaves* are poisonous)
- Sweet corn on the cob, peel ears back
- Sweet peppers, cut
- Hand-cut grass (non-treated with chemicals)
- Mealworms, waxworms (very limited as these are very high in fat)

Ducks and geese love to forage, and will often stick their heads into mud to search for insects. **Remember, check out the toxic foods list under the "Resources" section for a complete list!**

### What NOT to Feed:

**Whole corn or cracked corn:** Corn is not nutritionally-complete and should only be given as fresh treats or in scratch mixture. A.S.K. has rescued numerous ducks that have had serious nutritional deficiencies stemming from diets that were 100% corn-based.

**Bread:** Can be given as an occasional treat, but should not be fed daily. Birds that are fed bread repeatedly (especially at city parks) develop nutritional deficiencies and "angel wing." Bread has the capacity to "fill up" birds, lessening their interest in eating what is healthier for them; essentially it is junk food! Angel wing appears like a broken wing but is a result of deficiency. Note: bread can also hinder the flight of wild birds and should never be fed.

**Iceberg Lettuce:** No nutritional value.

## Water

Fresh drinking water should be available daily, and depending upon the flock size, numerous water containers should be available. Your birds should NEVER be without drinking water! Water should be placed near feeding stations; birds require water while eating. As a result, food can get damp; remember to change it regularly (and don't over-fill it) so that mold does not grow!

During the winter, A.S.K. replenishes water at least 3 times a day due to freezing. Ducks enjoy getting IN their water and extreme caution should be taken if you want to place electrical heaters in containers. Not only can birds get burned, but they can also get tangled in cords. It's safest to simply break the ice! Water containers placed near heat lamps will likely not freeze as quick.

**Swimming:** Domestic birds are farm animals, not wildlife, even though some species are derived from wild birds. It is *not* required that you have a natural pond or lake for birds to swim in. A.S.K. provides numerous pools of varying sizes. We have found that many birds have difficulty exiting large pools. Birds that are disabled or have permanent injuries, as many of our rescued birds do, can drown in pools that are too deep. Our special-needs flock does not have open access to swimming pools to eliminate the risk of tiring and drowning. When domestic birds have been dumped or are kept next to wild water sources, we have noted that the majority of the time they are not IN the water, but near the edge for quick escape from predators. If you construct a natural pond make sure that the edges have gentle inclines so birds can easily get in and out.

**Enrichment:** Sprinklers set on/off in various places may make your birds happy! Birds don't usually try to take baths in them, but they do like to forage for insects that are brought to the surface as the water hits the soil.

## Housing

A.S.K.'s flocks are kept in a .5-1 acre predator-proof yard. A 7-foot high secure fence surrounds the perimeter. Fencing is buried beneath the ground just enough to make a right angle. This ensures that mammals cannot easily dig under. A.S.K. does not provide fencing on the top of the enclosure; our birds are large enough in size to dissuade raptors from attempting to capture them. If you are housing ducklings/goslings, be aware that owls and hawks can easily carry away birds, even during the middle of the day. Numerous small trees comprise our yard. If a tree happens to be close to a fence, this can equate to an access point for mammals like raccoons and opossums. Make sure to fence these areas off.

\*See photo examples below! Wind breaks and shelters are provided. Fall/winter shelters can be comprised of stacked straw bales. Straw bales are stacked at least two tall (3 tall for larger birds like geese) creating a 3-sided structure. A secure roof can be laid on top using lumber/plastic materials. These items must be secure to prevent wind from blowing roofs off. This can be achieved by placing heavy bricks on top. A.S.K. uses weatherized plywood for roofs or sheet metal. During the spring/summer, the straw bale sides on the back can be removed allowing for more air flow. Food should be under cover to prevent mold. Pre-fabricated storage sheds (without the doors) can also be used as cover for birds and their food.

Some of A.S.K.'s birds enjoy the comforts of 100-watt heat lamps during the harsh winter months, however, many do not. Ducks and geese do not require heat as adults, and should be acclimated to outside temperatures as long as they've been raised outside. Physiologically, ducks/geese can create heat, but it is especially important that they are fed daily (obviously) to allow their energy reserves to not be compromised during harsh weather.

### **Tips:**

- A.S.K. has found that ducks/geese do not like the sound of tarp as it rustles due to wind. Avoid placing tarp over straw bale huts as this may prevent birds from entering.

- Make sure that entrances to shelters are not too small. Birds should be able to easily walk in and out and see a large portion of what's inside. Birds will often be hesitant to enter a structure if they perceive that a predator could be hiding inside.
- Birds will not freeze if they choose to swim during the winter. However, water sources that freeze pose a significant risk if birds do not exit the water while it's still unfrozen. Ice can narrow in a flock of domestics and due to heavy bodyweights and flight inability; they are often unable to jump out of the water and onto the ice sheet like their wild counterparts. Birds can then remain trapped among ice sheets and must be rescued using hovercrafts.
- Ponds can be kept open during the winter if you can afford to install electric "bubblers."
- Swimming access is not fundamental for domestics during the winter.

A basic cover shelter for grain and water with room for birds to also sit underneath. The height can be reduced to one bale all the way around if you only have ducks. Geese require a taller entrance. The entrance can also be reduced in size by placing a straw bale in front on one side. Make sure birds are not scared to enter; birds could starve to death if they are scared to enter and this is their only access to food, so BE CAUTIOUS!

A larger structure can be made to provide additional cover for birds. Weatherized plywood walls are attached to a sturdy timber frame with clear roofing. Straw bales are placed around the base and can be added/removed based on temperature. Again, it is vital to allow birds to acclimate to the structure. The opening can be made smaller as birds get more comfortable to surroundings.



## RESOURCES

Comprehensive Duck Info (recommended!): <http://duckrescuenetwork.org>

Toxic Foods List: <http://www.parrot-and-conure-world.com/non-toxic-for-birds.html>

Angel Wing: [http://wildpro.twycrosszoo.org/s/00dis/miscellaneous/angel\\_wing.htm](http://wildpro.twycrosszoo.org/s/00dis/miscellaneous/angel_wing.htm)