

BREEDING AND REARING LARGE COCHINS

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Photos: Bobo Athes; all photos are of his own Cochins.



I recorded the following story years ago, from the mouth of a very good Cochin breeder. I think it's still valuable, because we know very well that Cochin fanciers have to manage a breed which is very difficult to keep in top quality. It is possible, but it really takes some effort, focus, plenty of food (money), a little knowledge of the breed and a lot of 'feeling'.

Now I'll leave you with his story below:

"My first rule is, if you breed large fowl Cochin, no matter what colour variety you keep, you will need to outcross with a bird of from another blood line every two years. Be careful of course; preferably use a hen of a good quality and then see how that turns out. Then select a good hen from that offspring and cross it into your line.

This is also possible with a rooster, but according to my experience in recent years, a rooster, no matter how beautiful he is, will often pass on many faults, that immediately sneak into your whole line. A rooster is half of the breeding pen, and in terms of inheritance it is more dominant, according to my personal experience.

The fertility of these big guys is often not the best; especially the older males can be extremely lazy. I pick the feathers of both hens and rooster around the vent opening - do not clip them; that gives stinging stubbles and they will not like that. To get them more vital and in the mood for pairing, I feed them buttermilk and multivitamins, and remove the hens occasionally for a day.



Do not forget to add artificial lighting facilities; light stimulates egg laying and fertility. So, along with the sunlight, try to provide them with 14 to 16 hours of lighting period by using artificial lighting. You should also comfort your chickens with a good spacious and dry loft, with a thick layer of shavings. A few times a week get a rake through the curls, because it will soon get all stuck by those big muffed feet.

A good quality feed is a must. Personally I prefer to feed them [Garvo](#)® fancy chicken breeder pellet; they get it in the morning – in moderate quantities - and in the afternoon they a handful of mixed grain, some kale an grated carrots. The entire rearing period they get buttermilk; they find it delicious, and they are waiting eagerly for, or so it seems. In addition, of course, always fresh drinking water; once a week I add a drop of chlorine bleach in it, which helps maintain an open airway.

Then one can only hope for some fertilized eggs, because there is nothing more beautiful than a club of those nice round Cochin chicks. You will usually soon learn to see if a chick will become a good animal, disqualification faults excluded, of course.



Then we can start rearing. Good rearing is not accomplished with just a handful of chick starter. You actually have to teach them to eat very varied food and vary a lot. I make the Garvo ® chick starter mash a little damp, and from the first day I add a drop of cod liver oil and some powdered milk. Everything in moderation! Too much of something and you see it right in the droppings; when they go sticky, you should immediately take a step back.



As soon as the wing feathers have developed a bit, the chicks are allowed daily some bread with buttermilk. I continue with this until they are about 5 months old, then I switch to the Garvo ® fancy cockerel grower pellets that have a lot of protein in it. I still mix it with some starter mash, and they get a lot of green and carrots.

What is also good is pig mash; and they like to eat it. However, everything in moderation, you do have to keep them a little eager for food. They should be eager when you enter the chicken house, but still get enough



food and drink. That is what I mean by having some 'feeling', which can be learned by observing the chickens well.



What is also very important: space! They should be able to run and make crazy jumps. You do not know what you see, really laughable. At such moments I can thoroughly enjoy my animals. Exercise is good, because they have to get strong muscles and their osseous system must be developed.

In the meantime, outside in the field, they pick something that Mother Nature provides; a little worm, a fly, a blade of grass and not to forget: the sun.

No living being can exist without the sun and chickens roaming outside a lot often have the most beautiful eyes and leg colour. Occasionally a little rain does much good to the feathering, although Cochins do not love to be out in the rain. Free roaming is good, except in really wet weather; then you had better keep them inside the chicken house or roofed run, that is also better for their foot feathering. My grandfather always said: a chicken hates wet feet - and that is really true.





Now you may be thinking where did he get his wisdom? I refer to the previous line. Always keep your eyes and ears open and listen to what older breeders tell. Over the years I have learned a lot from older breeders, my father, Olthof, Jules Arentse or Friedrich Schwing. The latter was a well-known German breeder; the first fancier in Europe to breed huge Cochin as there were in America. Many have benefited from his animals.

Of course it is good to combine everything you hear with your own ideas and feelings, then you can come a long way. Everyone breeds and keeps his animals in his own way. If you obtain good results with it, then you certainly should continue especially with it.

A request: If you think you've bred a beautiful Cochin, please do enter it at an exhibition. Unfortunately we see far too little LF Cochins on the shows. Now I must admit, exhibiting a LF Cochin in a good way is almost a profession, next time I will tell you about that."



Unfortunately, here the story ends. The breeder who is quoted here is Martin Straver, who died early 2014, so no

supplement will ever be given to this piece. Despite his flaws and imperfections, he was a very good breeder and many fanciers today can benefit from his thorough knowledge on this beautiful breed.



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