

# Turkey Farming

By Anna Von Reitz



When I was a kid I was Queen of the Poultry Yard. I learned up front, close, and personal about pecking orders and Geese Police and, most of all, about turkeys.

Turkeys are so stupid that they will stand under a rain gutter and drown.

They can fly, but they won't do so to save themselves.

If they do fly, they will land on the roof of a shed and sit there until you go get a ladder and risk your life and skin to scabble around grabbing them and bringing them safely back down to the ground.

I never got the impression that they were scared of heights. Quite the opposite. I found one sitting on the ridgepole of a five story barn one summer afternoon.

I saw that and said to myself, "Forget it. I am not going up there and fighting with a thirty pound turkey."

This I repeated that night, the next day, the next night.... and there he was, still sitting there the next day, just taking in the breeze.

"Do you think that turkey is dead," my Father asked mildly, "or just daydreaming?" I rigged a blanket sling along one side of the barn, used a bow and arrow to carry a nylon tie rope over the barn roof to the far side of the barn, secured it, climbed up to the ridgepole, skinned across, pushed the turkey off in the general direction of the blanket sling.... he landed, none the worse for wear.

Wish I could say the same thing for myself. There is something about an experience like that, that makes you who you are. To this day, when I remember some of the things that I have gone through for turkeys, I cringe.

They have a nasty habit of pecking at things indiscriminately, without bothering to even look at what they are pecking. Hands, tin cans, water pails, other birds, pieces of lint, plastic cups, sunglasses, it really doesn't matter. Turkeys peck just to peck.

I have stuffed saw dust into old socks, attached them to the wire fence, and watched turkeys peck at these things for hours. Just to peck.

I guess it exercises their necks. Stretches their wattles. Makes them feel real good like a long-necked goose.

But no goose would do anything so stupid and monotonous. Ever.  
I have seen adult turkeys sit down on their own chicks and smother them to death, completely oblivious of what they were doing.

I've seen them get their heads caught in a large gauge wire fence and be too dumb to simply back out. And if you try to pull them back out of their dilemma, they will fight and squawk and flap and spread their wings and feathers and stomp their feet and try to gouge you with their spurs.

They are just too dim to grasp the situation they are in or understand that you are trying to help. I guess they think that they are going to get through that wire fence somehow, by leaning on it.

Raising a turkey from a chick to an adult is an endless, nasty challenge, akin to a military drill in peacetime.

They will stand motionless for hours, doing nothing observable, just staring out at nothing at all. And then, suddenly, for no reason, run out in front of a speeding car. You, of course, have to make the good faith effort to rescue them from themselves at every step.

They drove me crazy. They drove my dog crazy. I could almost say I developed a hatred for turkeys, but they are somehow too vapid to raise that much emotion. It's more like a bad smell, and by the way, turkeys stink. They really do. They have a peculiar, unforgettable, dusty, rancid butter stench as adults.

If you don't dust them and fluff them and risk your life in the cause of turkey health, they will find lice somewhere, even when none of the other birds have lice, and then you will have to catch them and dust them with noxious powders twice a day for a week. Can life get better than this?

And then, for no apparent reason, they'll stop eating. Just quit. It's not a hunger strike or a boycott of Turkey Chow. They forget to eat. So they starve.

Then you have to entice them back into the habit of eating.

And that's not a pretty story, either.

Suffice it to say that there is an actual reason behind that old saying, "Don't let the turkeys get you down."

They will never realize how needy they are, or how helpless they are. God knows, they will never say "thank you".

They will peck at you viciously at every opportunity.

They will attack the other birds for no reason at all.

They will get themselves into endless odd predicaments.

They won't agree with your solutions to their problems.

Still, they won't make it without you.

They'll just sit in the sun in 105 degree heat and die of sunstroke, because they are too dumb to walk ten feet and sit down in the shade.

Folks, don't let the turkeys of this world get you down. Realize that there are some people that are never going to grasp what you are trying to tell them. They aren't going to thank you. They aren't going to be grateful for all your work and effort. They are just going to keep on being exactly what they are and doing what they do.

There's no cure for turkeys. All we can offer them is grace.

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