



## Turkey Fact Sheet

**We are committed to finding safe, loving homes for our rescued animals and want to make sure that you are making an informed decision when choosing to adopt. Please read this Fact Sheet carefully before filling out the application, as well as do your own research.**

### Characteristics:

- Domestic turkeys live to be 2-6 years old.
- Factory farm turkeys are bred to be abnormally large, which results in early death.
- Turkeys enjoy being petted and talked to. They love music. Turkeys are very vocal and always have a lot to say!
- Turkeys molt once per year and it lasts 4-10 weeks.
- Before adopting a turkey:
  - Check your local zoning regulations to make sure that you can have this type of animal
  - Make sure that you have the time to care for it and that you have responsible caretakers to cover for you in the event of illness or when on vacation
  - Make sure that your vet cares for this species; if s/he does not, locate one who does prior to adopting turkeys.

### Feeding:

- Clean, fresh water should be available at all times. Check often throughout the day.
- We purchase gamebird feed from the farm supply store. Make sure that you don't purchase grower feed, which is designed for fast growth and often contains antibiotics. We mix gamebird feed with egg layer feed to provide calcium. Adding timothy hay pellets can also provide roughage without a lot of calories.
- As these birds are bred to be large, food intake should be restricted with extra greens (pasture, alfalfa, grain sprouts, lettuce, cabbage, swiss chard) and roughage.
- Turkeys also love fruit, but it should be given in limited quantities.
- It is very important to monitor your turkey's weight, as they are prone to arthritis and heart problems.
- Factory farm turkeys are often debeaked and need a deep dish for their food so that they can pick it up more easily. Most turkeys don't like to eat their food off of the ground. Make sure that the dish is not so big that the bird can step in it; this will prevent the food from being contaminated by feces.
- **Eggs should be collected daily.** Even if you aren't going to use the eggs, they need to be collected, as they will attract predators. They will also rot, making for odorous and unhealthy conditions.

## Health Care:

- We strongly recommend checking your birds from top to bottom once a week. Check legs and feet for cracked areas or swelling; check bottom and vent and clean as needed; check body for injury; check for clean nostrils and clear eyes without discharge. It should be noted that many factory farm turkeys have had their toenails removed. If they do have toenails, they will need to be checked and trimmed regularly.
- During your weekly health checks, be sure to check your turkey for lice/mites. They tend to be around the vent and look like small moving dots (lice are white/yellow and mites are black/red). They can be prevented by giving your turkey access to dirt for taking “dust baths.” They can be treated using a medicated dusting powder or spray.
- If you notice diarrhea, listlessness, fluffed feathers, loss of appetite, or coughing, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Turkeys can suffer from abscesses on the footpads that look like corns. This condition is referred to as bumblefoot. If there is pus, it needs to be cultured to determine what antibiotic should be used. Some cases are mild and can be treated with wraps alone, while others may need antibiotics. This condition can become chronic.
- If you notice bloody diarrhea and listlessness, consult your vet immediately. These are signs of coccidiosis, a parasitic infection. Keeping the bedding clean and dry will help to prevent this disease.
- A fecal test should be done every three months to check for internal parasites. Consult your vet about worming medications.
- In warm weather, heat exhaustion is common. Signs include panting, open mouth breathing, drooping, dark colored head, and collapse. Action must be taken immediately. Take turkey inside, turn on a fan, and mist lightly with cool water. Call your veterinarian.
- Be mindful of possible crop impaction. This is when food becomes lodged in the crop, preventing passage through the digestive tract. If not detected, the bird will die from malnutrition. Feel the crop of any bird who stops eating or seems sick. Surgery is needed to remove the impaction.
- The best way to pick up your bird is to fold your arms and upper body over the wings and back of the turkey, hug firmly, and lift. If you lose a wing, put the bird down and start over. Their legs can be easily damaged, so never handle them by the legs and stay low to the ground when handling them.

## Shelter & Fencing:

- To guard against predators, your birds should have a secure shelter that latches for them to stay in overnight. It should be large enough for them to move around, but small enough to keep them warm in winter. It should be waterproof, predator-proof, and well-ventilated. It should also be insulated and draft-free.
- Provide places for the birds to roost, such as a bale of hay/straw. Keep in mind that their bodies are so large that they can't fly and can easily lose their balance. For this reason the roost needs to be low to the ground and sturdy enough to support them. Hens will need a nesting box.
- Provide plenty of hay/straw for bedding.
- The outdoor area should be fenced in for the turkey's protection. As they cannot fly, the fence does not need to be more than four feet high. DO NOT USE CHICKEN WIRE, as it can easily be broken into by predators.