



# CATSKILL

## ANIMAL SANCTUARY

### Duck and Goose 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. We strongly recommend that you read this Fact Sheet before filling out the application, as well as do your own research.**

#### Characteristics

- Ducks and geese are waterfowl and need to have access to water. Their feathers are naturally waterproof and insulating, allowing them to tolerate colder temperatures.
- Ducks and geese generally get along well together; both species are social animals who do not like living alone.
- Domestic ducks can live to be 10-15 years old; geese can live 15-20 years.
- Geese tend to be territorial and are good at chasing off intruders; they can be aggressive, especially during breeding season. They will typically back off if you wave your arms and move towards them, making noise.
- Geese molt annually and mate for life. Ducks molt twice per year. Molts last for 6-8 weeks.
- Geese and many female breeds of ducks can be quite noisy, so consider your neighbors before adopting. Muscovy ducks make little noise.
- Before adopting a duck or goose:
  - Check your local zoning regulations to make sure that you can have them
  - Make sure that you have the time to care for them 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 or, prior to adoption, find one in your area that does.

#### Feeding

- Clean, fresh water should be available at all times. They can choke to death if allowed to eat without water. Check often throughout the day, as they drink large amounts. Since they use the water to help them eat, food and water should be close together. As a result, their water gets dirty very quickly and will need to be changed at least twice daily.
- Waterfowl will naturally forage for bugs and plants, but should be given grain at least once a day.
- Non-medicated feed is essential, as many medications are fatal for waterfowl.
- The best combination is a mixture of cracked corn, oats, wheat, and black oil sunflower seeds.
- Free choice food is best, as they are typically able to self-regulate food intake; make sure that the food stays dry, as moldy food is toxic.

- Waterfowl also like to eat green and fresh fruits/vegetables; if you allow them in your garden, they can be good “weeders.” They cannot eat raw potato peelings; they do not like alfalfa or tough grasses.
- Choose a feeding container that is heavy enough to not tip over and small enough so that they can’t stand in it, as it could become 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. Ducks and geese are very good at hiding their nests.

### Health Care

- Ducks and geese are pretty hardy and not as prone to disease and/or parasites as other birds. However, it is very important for you to find a qualified veterinarian before bringing you birds home.
- It is good to check each bird every 5-7 weeks. Check toenails and trim as needed; check feet for cracked areas or swelling; check bottom and vent and clean as needed; check for weight loss; check for clean nostrils without discharge.
- It is recommended to have a fecal test performed every 3-4 months and to worm your birds twice a year.
- In winter, watch for frostbite on feet and on knobs of Chinese/African geese—these areas will turn pale and then bright red rimmed with white.
- Ducks and geese can suffer from abscesses on the footpads that look like corns. This 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. However, the wraps must be kept clean and dry, so the bird must be isolated from the pond/swimming area. You should consult your veterinarian to determine treatment.
- Signs of a respiratory infection include: gurgled breathing, nasal discharge, lethargy, and loss of appetite. Consult your veterinarian if you see these signs in your bird.
- 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.
- Waterfowl can fly and may fly over their fence. If this is happening, you should clip their flight feathers. Discuss how to do this with your veterinarian.
- The best way to pick up your bird is to herd it into as small an area as possible. For ducks: place one hand onto the duck’s back and one hand in front of its chest to keep it from moving. Then move hands over wings and lift. If you lose a wing, put the bird down and start over. For geese: fold your arms and upper body over the wings and back of the goose, hug firmly, and lift. If you lose a wing, put the bird down and start over.

### Shelter & Fencing

- It is best to have a large confined space for your waterfowl; a spot with a slight slope and sandy soil with both sunny and shady areas is ideal.
- Height of fencing should be 5-6 ft. for flying breeds and 3-4 ft. for non-flying breeds. **Do not use chicken wire alone as fencing;** it is too flimsy, allowing predators to break in easily.

- Waterfowl are good at escaping, so fencing needs to be well-maintained so that they cannot escape through openings. Fencing should be 4-18" underground to keep out burrowing predators.
- To guard against predators, your birds should have a secure shelter that latches for them to stay in overnight. For their optimum comfort, choose a shelter that's at least 8' x 10' and allow a minimum of 6 square feet of shelter per bird. It should be waterproof, predator-proof, and well-ventilated. Provide places for the birds to roost, such as a bale of hay/straw.
- Waterfowl do not sleep at night and can become restless; they should not be confined more than is necessary.
- Ducks and geese are messy animals; shelters must be cleaned and bedded with fresh bedding each day.
- In winter, keep area around feeders clear of ice and snow to help prevent frostbite.
- The swimming area/pond must have easy access in and out; it should be easy to clean or large enough to clean itself. **Kiddy pools are not acceptable.**
- The swimming area/pond should be fenced-in or the property should have a perimeter fence to keep out predators.