**YVCipedia POULTRY**

Duck Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Domestic ducks are hardy, social, and highly adaptable birds that thrive in backyard settings with the right setup. While often kept for eggs, pest control, or companionship, ducks are intelligent and curious animals that can become quite bonded to their caregivers.

At YVC, we see ducks increasingly treated as pets—and for good reason. They’re expressive, flock-oriented, and full of personality. With proper care, ducks can live 8–12 years and offer both enjoyment and utility to a household or small farm.

## **Housing & Environment**

Ducks are outdoor animals that need space to roam and water to splash in—but they also require protection from predators and the elements. A duck’s ideal home includes access to pasture or yard, a secure night shelter, and a clean water source deep enough to dip their heads and ideally bathe.

At YVC, we recommend housing ducks in predator-proof shelters that are dry, well-ventilated, and draft-free. They do not roost like chickens, so ground-level sleeping areas with soft bedding such as straw or pine shavings work well. Bedding should be changed frequently to manage moisture.

Outdoor areas should be safely enclosed or monitored, as ducks are vulnerable to foxes, raccoons, hawks, and neighborhood dogs. During winter, most ducks tolerate cold well as long as they have dry shelter and are protected from wind and wet conditions.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Ducks are omnivores with hearty appetites and constant foraging instincts. They’ll graze, dig for bugs, and dabble in any standing water they can find—but they still need balanced nutrition to stay healthy.

At YVC, we recommend a daily diet structured roughly as follows:

* **80–90% of a commercial waterfowl or all-flock pellet** appropriate to their life stage (starter, grower, or layer). Avoid chicken-only feeds, which may lack niacin.
* **10–15% fresh greens and vegetables** like lettuce, peas, corn, cucumber, or squash.
* **Occasional grains or safe kitchen scraps** for variety, though treats should remain limited.

Niacin (vitamin B3) is essential for growing ducks—particularly breeds like Pekins. We often advise supplementing with brewer’s yeast or a specific niacin additive during growth stages, especially if you're using general-purpose feed.

Fresh, clean water must always be accessible near food, as ducks need to wash down their feed to prevent choking. Water containers should be deep enough for head dunking, which helps keep eyes, nares, and sinuses clean.

Avoid feeding: bread, citrus, onions, salty snacks, chocolate, and anything moldy or spoiled.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Ducks are flock animals with complex social dynamics. They communicate through body language and vocalization, form strong bonds, and often follow familiar humans with a surprising level of loyalty—especially if hand-raised.

While most ducks tolerate gentle handling, they prefer to stay on the ground and can become stressed if restrained improperly. Support the body fully, avoid excessive pressure on the chest, and minimize chasing or cornering, which can trigger panic.

Ducks can imprint early and may exhibit separation stress if raised alone. At YVC, we always recommend keeping at least two ducks, ideally more, to ensure emotional well-being. Mixing breeds is typically fine, but size and temperament differences should be monitored.

## **Enrichment**

Ducks are explorers at heart. They need space, stimulation, and access to water for more than just drinking. Enrichment improves both their physical condition and behavioral health.

Access to a shallow kiddie pool, pond, or trough-style water source allows for preening, bathing, and playful dabbling—essential behaviors for healthy ducks. Add safe, rotating items to their environment: foraging mats, greens floating in water, small logs, or tunnels made of PVC.

Even simple opportunities to root through leaf piles or overturned soil provide hours of entertainment and exercise. Keep the environment clean and varied to prevent boredom or feather damage from overpreening.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Backyard ducks are susceptible to a number of health conditions, some of which can go unnoticed until advanced. At YVC, we strongly recommend **annual wellness exams and fecal testing**, especially for flocks treated as pets or exposed to wildlife. Additional lab work may be advised for aging ducks or those showing signs of illness.

Health concerns we commonly evaluate include:

* **Bumblefoot**, resulting from poor substrate or injury
* **Vitamin or mineral deficiencies**, particularly niacin
* **Respiratory issues**, often related to damp or unsanitary housing
* **Reproductive problems** in females, such as egg binding or peritonitis
* **Parasites**, both internal (worms) and external (lice/mites)

Ducks hide illness well. Watch for signs like reduced appetite, listlessness, abnormal droppings, limping, excessive vocalization, or changes in egg production. Any sudden behavioral change should be taken seriously.

Cleanliness is key: maintain dry bedding, rotate pastures, and manage standing water to reduce bacterial and parasitic risk.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Ducks don’t need a pond, but they do need **access to water deep enough to clean their faces and bathe.**
* Males (drakes) can be kept with hens but may overbreed in small flocks—ratios matter.
* Ducks can be surprisingly cold-hardy but are more vulnerable to **heat stress** than many owners expect.
* They’ll return to a safe coop at night if trained with routine and incentives.
* Duck eggs are richer than chicken eggs and excellent for baking.

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Secure, dry night shelter with soft bedding
* Enclosed run or pasture with shaded areas
* Kiddie pool or water trough for bathing
* Waterfowl-appropriate pellets with niacin support
* Shallow waterers near feed
* Fresh produce and enrichment items
* Brewer’s yeast (for young ducks)
* Grit and calcium (for laying ducks)
* Carrier or crate for veterinary visits
* Thermometer/hygrometer for housing in extreme temps

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*