**YVCipedia POULTRY**

Goose Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Domestic geese are hardy, intelligent, and often surprisingly affectionate animals with strong flocking instincts and a natural sense of territory. While traditionally kept for meat, eggs, or as natural weeders and guard animals, geese also make devoted backyard companions when raised with regular human interaction.

At YVC, we find that geese can be a deeply rewarding part of a homestead or backyard setup—but they do best with structure, consistency, and space to roam. With proper care, most domestic geese live 10–20 years, though some may live even longer.

## **Housing & Environment**

Geese thrive in outdoor environments where they have access to safe grazing areas, shelter from weather extremes, and space to move freely. Unlike chickens, they don't perch and prefer low, ground-level sleeping areas lined with dry bedding such as straw or pine shavings.

We recommend a **secure, predator-proof shelter** for nighttime protection, with ample ventilation but no drafts. Geese are relatively cold-hardy and tolerate winter well as long as they stay dry and have protection from wind and ice. In summer, shade and access to water are essential to prevent overheating.

Pasture or large yards are ideal, especially where grass is available—geese are natural grazers and will feed extensively on fresh greens. Fencing should be tall and solid enough to prevent predator access and deter wandering, particularly during breeding season when ganders may become territorial.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Geese are primarily herbivores and consume large amounts of grass when it's available, but their diet still needs to be nutritionally complete—especially when grazing is limited or during molting and laying seasons.

At YVC, we typically recommend a balanced approach:

* **About 70–80% of a goose’s diet can come from pasture and greens** when conditions allow. Supervised access to untreated lawns or forage is ideal.
* **Supplement with a waterfowl or all-flock pellet** appropriate to age and production stage (starter for goslings, maintenance or layer for adults).
* **Offer leafy vegetables and occasional grains** as variety—not as the core diet. Examples include romaine, cabbage, kale, chopped carrots, or peas.

Laying females may need calcium supplementation during the season. Crushed oyster shell or cuttlebone can be provided free-choice. Always ensure **clean, fresh water is available near food**, as geese need to dip their beaks frequently to eat comfortably.

Avoid bread, citrus, salty or sugary snacks, and spoiled food. Goslings, especially, require good niacin intake—brewer’s yeast or niacin-enriched feed may be needed to support proper leg development.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Geese are flock animals that bond deeply—with each other and, when hand-raised, with their people. They’re social, vocal, and observant, often alerting to unfamiliar sounds or visitors with loud honking.

While they can be wary of strangers, hand-raised geese are usually calm and curious. Gentle handling and consistent routines help them become well-adjusted. When necessary, support the body fully, avoid wing flapping, and minimize stress during restraint.

Geese can show seasonal aggression, particularly ganders during spring when they protect mates and nests. At YVC, we advise thoughtful flock ratios (generally 1 male to 2–4 females) and giving geese space when broody or during mating season.

## **Enrichment**

While less toy-driven than parrots or ducks, geese still benefit from variety in their environment. Grazing, water access, and changes to their surroundings all help prevent boredom and reinforce natural behaviors.

Give geese **safe access to shallow water**—a small pond, trough, or kiddie pool can offer a place to bathe, splash, and cool off. They also enjoy foraging through new areas, interacting with other animals, and supervised yard time.

Routine is calming for geese. Familiar spaces, regular feeding times, and calm human interaction can go a long way in supporting their emotional health. If they’re bonded to you, they may follow you around like loyal watchdogs with feathers.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Geese are generally robust birds, but like all domestic animals, they benefit from routine veterinary oversight. At YVC, we recommend **annual exams and fecal tests** for at least one of birds from the flock, even for pasture-based or free-roaming flocks. Additional bloodwork may be advised for older birds or those with unexplained symptoms.

Health concerns we see in geese include:

* **Bumblefoot**, especially in heavier breeds on hard or wet surfaces
* **Parasites**, internal or external, particularly when exposed to wild birds
* **Nutritional deficiencies**, notably in growing goslings without adequate niacin
* **Reproductive problems**, including egg binding or peritonitis in layers
* **Respiratory infections** from poor ventilation or exposure to moldy bedding

Geese may hide illness until it's advanced. Watch for decreased activity, limping, labored breathing, swollen joints, droopy wings, or changes in droppings. Sudden behavioral changes, vocalization shifts, or appetite loss should prompt evaluation.

Good sanitation—clean bedding, rotated grazing, and limited access to standing water—is key to preventing illness.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Geese have excellent memories and will often remember people and routines for years.
* Most domestic geese cannot fly and will stay within fencing, but lighter breeds may require wing clipping.
* Contrary to myth, geese are not always aggressive—they’re curious and confident, and many become deeply affectionate.
* Goose eggs are larger and richer than chicken eggs, and excellent for baking.
* They can overheat more easily than they freeze—cool water access is critical in hot weather.

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Predator-proof shelter with clean, dry bedding
* Grazing area or access to fresh forage
* Waterfowl or all-flock pellet with niacin support
* Free-choice calcium for laying females
* Deep water source for drinking and bathing
* Fencing suitable to prevent escape and predator entry
* Carrier or crate for veterinary transport
* Brewer’s yeast or niacin for young birds
* Grit or access to natural ground for digestion
* Shade structures and windbreaks for seasonal comfort

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*