**YVCipedia POULTRY**

Guinea Fowl Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Guinea fowl are alert, independent, and somewhat wild-natured birds originally native to Africa. They’ve been domesticated for pest control, egg production, and as watchful additions to backyard flocks. Known for their unique helmeted appearance and loud, rattling calls, guineas are highly social and do best when kept in small groups.

At YVC, we find guinea fowl especially helpful in managing ticks and garden pests. While not as cuddly as chickens or ducks, they’re hardy, low-maintenance birds that thrive with some space, minimal handling, and consistency in their routine.

## **Housing & Environment**

Guinea fowl are much more active than chickens and require secure housing with room to roam. Though they are relatively cold-hardy and adaptable to different climates, they still need a **dry, draft-free shelter** to escape wind, predators, and inclement weather.

Free-ranging is ideal for guineas, especially when raised to return to a consistent roost at night. They can be flighty and often prefer roosting in trees if not well-trained early. A secure coop should include **wide roosting bars** closer to the ceiling, as guineas like high perches.

While they tolerate confinement, overcrowding leads to stress and feather loss. A well-fenced yard helps prevent wandering and provides safety from foxes, hawks, and neighborhood dogs.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Guinea fowl are natural foragers and will eagerly hunt down bugs, ticks, seeds, and greens, especially when free-ranging. Still, a balanced diet ensures they get the nutrition they need, especially during laying, growth, or winter months when foraging is limited.

At YVC, we recommend:

* **A high-quality poultry or gamebird feed**, ideally 18–22% protein, depending on age and purpose
* **Free access to grit and clean water** at all times
* **Foraging time** for enrichment and natural pest control

They enjoy leafy greens, chopped veggies, and insects but avoid offering bread, processed snacks, or moldy feed. Laying females benefit from a **calcium source like oyster shell**, offered separately to avoid over-supplementing the rest of the flock.

Keets (young guinea fowl) require a higher protein starter and good niacin support. We often suggest brewer’s yeast supplementation in their early weeks to prevent leg problems.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Guineas are flock-oriented birds with strong group bonds. They're notoriously vocal—especially when alarmed or relocated—and serve as excellent “watchdogs” for the yard. While they tend to keep to themselves, they can integrate with chicken flocks if introduced carefully.

Unlike chickens, guinea fowl **do not usually tolerate close handling**. Even hand-raised birds often remain aloof. When handling is necessary, do so calmly, supporting their chest and wings to avoid injury.

Newly introduced guineas should be confined for 4–6 weeks to imprint on the coop and encourage them to return each night. Once accustomed to an area, they will patrol it daily and roost reliably—though some may revert to wild habits without routine.

## **Enrichment**

Guineas are innately active and get most of their enrichment from foraging and exploration. Rotating areas of access or offering supervised outings gives them a change of scenery and mental stimulation.

They enjoy:

* Scratching in leaf piles or mulch
* Pecking through tossed veggie scraps
* Dust bathing in dry dirt or sand

Keep their space varied, but avoid over-complicating it. A simple environment with safe ground and natural foraging is often the best enrichment for these birds.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Guinea fowl are generally robust, but their instinctive behaviors can lead to challenges—like wandering, injuries from flying into fencing, or exposure to predators.

At YVC, we recommend **annual exams and fecal tests** for at least one birds from the flock. These checkups help us monitor for parasites, nutritional imbalances, or signs of underlying disease. While blood panels aren’t always needed yearly, they’re sometimes recommended for aging birds or those with unexplained symptoms.

Common issues to watch for:

* **Parasites**, especially coccidia or lice/mites
* **Foot injuries** from jumping or rough roosts
* **Nutritional deficiencies**, especially in keets
* **Egg binding or reproductive problems** in laying females
* **Infectious diseases** when housed with mixed-species flocks

Keep bedding clean and dry, rotate forage areas, and monitor water sources for contamination to reduce disease risk.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Guinea fowl are monogamous during breeding season and often pair off
* Hens may hide nests in tall grass or underbrush, making egg collection tricky
* Their alarm calls are unmistakable and often loud, so they may not suit close neighbors
* Despite their standoffish nature, guineas can peacefully coexist with chickens, ducks, and turkeys
* A group of guineas is called a “confusion”—and it can live up to its name!

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Secure coop with high roosting bars
* Gamebird or poultry feed (protein: 18–22%)
* Grit and oyster shell (free-choice)
* Covered run or large foraging space
* Safe fencing to prevent escape and predator access
* Clean food and water containers
* Draft-free bedding (pine shavings or straw)
* Brewer’s yeast for keets (as needed)
* Travel crate or net for capture, if needed
* Dust bath area for natural grooming

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*