**YVCipedia POULTRY**

Quail Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Quail are small, ground-dwelling birds kept for their eggs, companionship, or as part of aviary ecosystems. In captivity, **Coturnix (Japanese) Quail** are the most common species, valued for their calm temperament, rapid maturity, and prolific egg production. **Bobwhite Quail** and **Button Quail** are also kept in aviary or hobbyist settings but have different care needs and behaviors.

At YVC, we typically see Coturnix quail in backyard flocks or indoor enclosures. While they’re relatively hardy birds, their small size and high metabolism mean they are vulnerable to both environmental stressors and nutritional imbalances. With appropriate care, they can live 2–4 years and provide rewarding interactions without requiring much space.

## **Housing & Environment**

Unlike chickens or ducks, quail do not perch and are not strong flyers. They prefer secure, ground-level enclosures with soft bedding, low ceilings to prevent injury from vertical flight attempts, and plenty of hiding areas to feel safe.

For small groups, we recommend an enclosure that allows at least **1 square foot per bird**, though more space is always better. Solid flooring lined with absorbent, dust-free bedding (like paper, straw, or hemp) helps prevent foot issues and provides for natural dust bathing. Overhead cover or leafy brush elements encourage natural hiding behavior and reduce stress.

Enclosures should be fully enclosed to protect against predators and escape. Even small gaps can allow quail to squeeze through or allow rodents in. Because they are highly susceptible to temperature extremes, indoor or sheltered outdoor setups are preferred in Maine, with attention to ventilation and drafts.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Quail have high protein requirements and fast metabolisms, especially during growth and egg production. At YVC, we recommend a **game bird-specific crumble or mash**, supplemented with safe greens and enrichment foods.

A healthy diet typically includes:

* **Formulated game bird starter or layer feed**, depending on age and purpose (typically 22–28% protein for chicks, 18–20% for layers)
* Occasional chopped greens such as **dandelion, lettuce, or herbs**
* Enrichment grains or seed mixes in small amounts for foraging stimulation
* Free-choice access to **grit** and **calcium** (such as crushed oyster shell) for layers

Fresh water should be available at all times and changed daily. Shallow dishes with marbles or mesh covers are ideal for chicks to prevent drowning.

Avoid feeding high-fat or high-carb treats (like bread, crackers, or table scraps), and ensure moldy or spoiled food is never offered—quail are very sensitive to toxins.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Quail are shy, ground-oriented birds that do best with minimal handling. They can become habituated to human presence with calm, consistent interaction but should never be grabbed or lifted unexpectedly. Sudden movements or loud noises can cause panic flights, which can lead to injury, especially in tall enclosures.

They are generally quiet, though males may crow or chirp during mating season. While they can be kept in small groups, overcrowding or unbalanced male-to-female ratios can lead to aggression, especially during breeding. A ratio of **1 male to 4–6 females** is ideal in mixed groups, or they may be housed as all-female or all-male flocks depending on your goals.

## **Enrichment**

Quail enjoy environmental enrichment more than toys. At YVC, we suggest focusing on naturalistic additions such as:

* Leaf piles or straw to scratch and hide in
* Platforms or ramps for exploration (low and secure)
* Dust bathing areas (fine sand or volcanic ash)
* Occasional scattering of mealworms or grains to encourage foraging behavior

This kind of enrichment helps reduce boredom and prevent feather pecking or stress behaviors.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Though often seen as low-maintenance, quail can develop health problems quickly if housing or diet is suboptimal. At YVC, we recommend **annual wellness exams and fecal testing** for pet quail, ideally at least one from the flock, especially if kept in indoor or mixed-species aviaries.

Potential health concerns include:

* **Respiratory infections**, often triggered by poor ventilation or high ammonia levels
* **Coccidiosis** and other intestinal parasites, particularly in young birds
* **Footpad dermatitis** (bumblefoot) from wet or abrasive flooring
* **Egg binding** in females with poor calcium intake or inadequate laying conditions
* **Injuries** from overcrowding or breeding aggression

Any signs of lethargy, drooping wings, decreased appetite, or changes in droppings should prompt veterinary evaluation. Due to their small size and fast metabolism, early intervention is critical.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Coturnix quail begin laying as early as 6 weeks of age
* They are capable of producing over 300 eggs per year under ideal conditions
* Despite their small size, quail are intelligent and capable of forming routines
* They are not long-distance fliers, but they will flush vertically if startled
* Button quail require different care than Coturnix and are best suited for aviaries

## **Supplies Checklist**

To support healthy and happy quail, we recommend:

* Secure, low-ceiling enclosure with dust-free bedding
* Game bird-specific feed (starter, grower, or layer depending on age)
* Grit and oyster shell for digestion and calcium support
* Dust bath area with fine sand or volcanic ash
* Low shelters or hide boxes for privacy
* Shallow waterers and feeders (marble-filled if chicks present)
* Supplemental heat source if housed outdoors in cold climates
* Annual wellness care including fecal screening

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*