

Rare Chickens Thrive At Sand Hill Farm

Looking for a special breed of chicken to raise in your backyard? A great place to start is Sand Hill Preservation Center. For \$2 you can get a catalog with a description of more than 230 rare breeds. For more than 20 years, Glenn and Linda Drowns have been raising, maintaining and improving breeds that were once on the brink of extinction.

"In the mid-1990's there were a number of breeds where we were one of only a few sources," recalls Drowns. "Today there are very few cases where that's true. It's taken a lot of pressure off us and helped some small hatcheries survive. Even the bigger ones are catching on and adding rare breeds to their list."

While plenty of hatcheries do carry rare breeds of chickens today, the Drowns have everything from a spotted white and black Anacona developed in Italy in 1898 to the White Houdan, which has a fifth toe and was imported from France in 1850. Just reading the catalog is a history lesson in chicken breeds and what distinguishes them.

What makes Sand Hill different from many rare breed breeders is pricing. They don't price their birds by how rare they are. They price them by how difficult it is to get them to reproduce. If a breed lays fewer eggs, the price will be higher than if it lays lots of eggs. He's not in it for the money.

"I would sooner see a rare breed not be rare," he says. "I'm much happier to see them spread around."

Some breeds are harder to spread around than others. They may not be good at pro-

ducing eggs or meat. Those are the ones that Drowns, a high school teacher by trade, most wants to preserve. The reason is in the genes.

"My income from teaching helps finance the problem breeds, the ones that if I was doing this commercially, I couldn't afford," he says. "The Egyptian Fayoumi is an example of a scrawny little bird, but one with tremendous resistance to disease and parasites. The breed is thousands of years old, and some day we may need those genes."

Drowns notes that today's commercial flocks are based on only a few breeding lines and could be very susceptible to a mass disease. "Commercial breeders using modern techniques could introduce resistant genes from a bird like the Egyptian Fayoumi faster than conventional breeding could develop resistance," he explains.

Doing what he does isn't easy. Each breed has to have its own pen. For Drowns that means feeding and watering more than 230 pens every day, and that doesn't count the turkey, guinea and duck breeds he maintains.

"It takes twice as long in the winter as the summer, as I have to carry 81 five-gal. buckets of water to the birds every morning before school and then feed them in the evening," he says. "It takes 2 1/2 hrs. in the morning and at night."

Then there's taking orders and filling them. Drowns sells day old chicks at prices of a few dollars each. Manx Rumpies are priced at \$6 each, while Mixed Frizzles



For more than 20 years, Glenn and Linda Drowns have been raising, maintaining and improving chicken breeds that were once on the brink of extinction.

are priced at only \$3 each, and the White Kraienkoppe are priced at \$5 each. He used to sell fertilized eggs for hatching, but no longer does.

"I would get calls from people with no experience complaining because they had 6 eggs hatch out of 8," recalls Drowns. "Any experienced poultry person would have been ecstatic. I once had a man order a few eggs each of several breeds. He called up and was upset because one breed hatched out all roosters and one all hens. He thought I should've sent him one rooster egg and two hen eggs of each."

Other things have changed too. Drowns no longer allows visitors to the poultry part of the operation out of concern over dis-

eases like Newcastle and Avian Influenza. He is concerned that government agencies could close down his or other poultry breeders if disease was a concern. Personally, he sees the large poultry operations as being more of a concern.

"The reality is our backyard flocks are likely more resilient to disease than commercial operations that are genetically identical," he points out.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Sand Hill Preservation Center, 1878 230th St. Calamus, Iowa 52729 (ph 563 246-2299; sandhill@fcom.net; www.sandhillpreservation.com).

Easy-To-Use Pickup Step

After buying a new pickup, Bob Weber discovered the tailgate was so high he had difficulty reaching inside the bed. And he couldn't find anything on the market to help him get into the bed without a lot of setup time.

So he made an add-on step that bolts onto the pickup's bumper and also onto the back side of the tailgate. When locked in the closed position, the step extends a few inches behind the back of the pickup.

"It adds convenience and safety, especially when there's snow and ice around," says Weber. "My helper and I both fell trying to climb into the bed on our old pickup, and I knew the new truck would result in a serious injury if I didn't do anything. And my daughter fell three times, which is when I

decided to do something."

The non-slip aluminum tread step measures 9 in. deep by 36 in. wide. It's secured by four quick release pins for fast removal. An optional handrail fits into slots on the step.

"It's as easy to use as opening the tailgate. There's no extra work unless you use the handrail," says Weber.

Sells for \$495 plus S&H. A powder-coated model is also available and sells for \$645 plus S&H. The optional handrail sells for \$95 plus S&H.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bob Weber, P. O. Box 873244; Wasilla, Alaska 99687 (ph 907 373-2625 or 907 775-2625; traveler0001@yahoo.com; tailgateEZstep.com).



Add-on step bolts onto pickup's bumper and also onto back side of tailgate.



Triple-Seat Asparagus Harvester

With 17 acres of asparagus to pick, workers at Edgar Farms in Innisfail, Alberta, needed something to speed up the process. The harvesting machine Doug Edgar designed and built turned out so well he built two more.

"Everything is made out of new materials," Edgar explains. "These have to run 6 to 7 weeks, and they need to be reliable. I want to be able to get parts for them quickly if they break down."

The design is simple, with foot steering and a shift behind the seat. Pickers lean forward and pick asparagus between their legs. Each machine has a main section operated by a driver with two wings that detach easily with quick pins, if there are just one or two pickers. The seats are 5 ft. apart to go directly over the asparagus rows.

The 1/8-in. wall, 1 1/2-in. square tubing framework runs 8 in. above the ground on wheelbarrow-size front tires with high-speed tapered wheel bearings. The back has 22 x 11.00-8 floatation tires. Conduit up the sides and over the top supports pvc white

canvas that protects pickers from sun and rain. A side bracket supports a basket, and there's a back rack for extra baskets.

Each machine is powered by a Honda motor and 5-speed lawn mower transmission with 5-to-1 belt reduction between the motor and transmission to achieve a 1/2 to 1 mph picking speed. Edgar retrofitted old propane tanks for fuel tanks that fuel the machine for about 7 10-hr. days.

Altogether, Edgar estimates he spent about \$3,000 (Canadian) per machine and that it would cost about \$5,000 now. They've been very reliable over the years and helped Doug and Elna Edgar successfully grow and market quality asparagus since 1989, along with peas, beans and livestock from their 6-generation farm.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Edgar Farms, Rt. 3, Innisfail, Alberta Canada T4G 1T8 (ph 403 227-2443; www.edgarfarms.com).



Foot steering makes it easy for pickers to lean forward and pick asparagus between their legs.



Machine is powered by a Honda motor and 5-speed lawn mower transmission.