

Famous Author Breeds Beautiful Show Birds

Jan Brett played with chicks as a girl, but it wasn't until she needed a chicken to model for one of her best-selling illustrated children's books that she began breeding them. Today her White Crested Black (WCB) bantam Polish chickens are like her, award winners.

"I had chickens in a book and needed to draw their feather pattern correctly," says Brett. "I got some Wyandottes at the feed store and fell in love. They were so much fun and had such humor and personality. Then I went to a poultry show and became fascinated by the variety of beautiful breeds."

Brett settled on the WCB bantam Polish as her preferred show breed. The breed dates back to the Middle Ages and has been in the U.S. since the 1830's. It has long feathers that cover the entirety of the head. The crest limits the birds' vision, making them easy targets of overhead predators.

Brett traded a visit to a school for her first birds of the breed. That breeder became her mentor and helped her get started, something she advises new breeders find.

The breeder also introduced her to the exhibition poultry world. Soon she met a second breeder, a show rival of the first. Again, her artwork was useful.

"He gave me some of his birds in exchange for some artwork," says Brett. "Others helped out as well, giving me birds to make sure I didn't have too much inbreeding."

At first she kept the lines separated, eventually crossbreeding them to develop her own line. She admits it can take years to define what a breeder wants to see.

"It's almost an artistic endeavor," she says. "Breeding brings together the pleasures of husbandry and nurturing with the love of genetics."

She maintains families within her flock to prevent inbreeding and doesn't bring in birds from other flocks. Brett breeds to meet characteristics outlined in the American Standard of Perfection (referred to by most judges) and The Bantam Standard.

She has added other variations of the bantam Polish, including the White Crested Blue and the Bearded Buff Laced. She also has some Dutch, which are like a tiny Leghorn. They were once known as the smallest bantam with a half-size egg.

While her mentors no longer show, Brett does and has won national awards with her birds. She suggests that poultry shows are good places to find a preferred breed and breeder. The American Bantam Association and the American Poultry Association websites list sanctioned shows.



Jan Brett and her White Crested Black bantam Polish chickens.

While hatcheries may feature a breed, they may not be purebred. Show birds are more likely to be true to the breed.

"People are often selling off extra stock at shows," she explains. "Ask lots of questions. Look for clean, healthy birds and ask about husbandry and does it have a fault that will require more care or prevent it from being a show bird."

She maintains about 200 birds in her flocks, including about 100 that she will sell after raising them up to assess. She admits that like any good breeder, she will keep the top 3 of each sex to show and add to the breeding flock.

Brett refuses to sell to anyone who plans to free-range the birds due to predator concerns. Buyers get a packet of information on how to groom them for shows, as well as how to protect them from disease.

She has sold birds into about 12 states, including Texas and Florida and has her flock NPIP certified for out-of-state shipping. She charges \$60 for a show quality pair and \$15 for a "pet" quality pair, adult birds only.

Brett still uses her birds as models for illustrations in her books. She says they are good for entertainment and for relaxation.

"Watching them feed is like sitting and having a cup of coffee," she says. "I never fail to enjoy their little dramas. I go to shows and talk about what this one or that one did. They fit well with my profession of storytelling and love of beauty. There is nothing bad about them."

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Where To Buy Pedal Tractor Parts

Pedal tractor parts are hard to find, but Samuelson Pedal Tractor Parts has a huge supply on hand, and they're also the only business that actually makes replacement tires for pedal tractors.

Samuelson can produce authentic replacement tires because they own the original 1950's Eska Company rear and front tire molds and the rear and front sidewall molds. Samuelson says the molds have been in use since the 1950's. The company makes all its tires in Iowa with the best quality rubber available. Rear tires are \$20 to \$30 each, depending on size. Front tires are \$25 each.

In addition to tires, Samuelson carries a complete line of parts for Eska, Ertl and Scale Model pedal tractors. Included are spark plugs, chain guards, seats, headlights, front ends, fenders for trailers and tractors and a variety of chains. The company also carries pedals, shift levers, seats and just about anything else needed to refurbish or repair an



Samuelson makes and sells a wide variety of pedal tractor parts, including his own replacement tires.

authentic pedal tractor.

Many new pedal tractors and older models are also in stock.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Samuelson Pedal Tractor Parts, 525 5th St. NW, Dyersville, Iowa 52040 (ph 563 875-6222; pedaltractorparts@aol.com).

FARM SHOW



Bananas are usually grown in the tropics, but an Ontario company successfully grows and sells them, as well as banana plants and the greenhouses to grow them in.

They're Growing Bananas In Canada

Canada Banana Farms has a grow-it-yourself plan for tropical fruit. The Ontario company grows bananas, mangoes, papaya, citrus and other tropical fruits, as well as organic vegetables. In addition to selling at local farmers markets and at the farm, the company also supplies plants and information.

"Many tropical fruits like bananas don't need that much light," says Terry Brake, company spokesman. "If you can grow a potted pine tree in your house, you can grow bananas. They just need a temperature of about 68 degrees."

Canada Banana Farms grow their fruit in 3 hoop houses, but Brake grew his first banana plant in a basement room. He gave it to Laurie Macpherson and showed her how to graft bananas and other tropical fruit. With his help, she turned his hobby into a business.

"She bought a farm and built hoop houses and started raising them," says Brake. "At first people thought it was a joke when we sold the fruit at farmers markets, but then we put on an open house. People started driving 2 or 3 hrs. to get our fresh fruit."

Brake now serves as her spokesperson, but he credits her with creating the business. Macpherson is not only selling fresh fruit, but also the plants it grows on and the greenhouses to grow it in. She sells individual banana starters for as little as \$15 for a 6-in. plant and \$55 for a 3-ft. tall plant.

She currently grows 7 different varieties of bananas. One variety called Big Bertha can produce as many as 300 bananas on a single plant.

Blake notes that a single banana tree requires as little as a 3 by 3-ft. space and can grow as high as 15 ft. However, dwarf trees grow to only 6 to 7 ft. tall.

"If you buy a tree, it will bear fruit in about 8 mos. in a heated, high humidity greenhouse, or in 14 to 18 mos. in a 68-degree house," says Brake.

Initially, the banana plant sends up 3 stems, each producing clumps or "hands" of bananas. Each stem produces from 200 to as much as 500 lbs. of fruit.

As the hands are harvested, the stems die back and suckers shoot up from the mother plant. Each sucker will also produce 3 stems.

"She would like people to grow their own," says Brake. "She sells individual plants, as well as turnkey greenhouse packages complete with furnaces, fans, ductwork and plants, everything needed."

The 24 by 50-ft. greenhouse kit is priced at \$35,000 and the 30 by 96-ft. kit is priced at \$85,000. In addition to the components, Macpherson provides 40 hrs. of tutoring on how to grow tropical fruit.

"We've shipped plants as far as Alberta and recently provided all the plants for a 300-ft. long greenhouse," says Brake. "Some are raising for their own use, and others are raising to sell at the farm gate."

Canada Banana Farms cannot ship plants to the U.S. but they're happy to consult across the border and recently helped a Texas operator set up a tropical fruit operation. However, there are U.S. companies that sell banana plants, including www.fastgrowingtrees.com.

Check out the "banana video" at www.farmshow.com.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Canada Banana Farms, 38926 Moncrieff Rd., RR3, Blyth, Ont. Canada N0M 1H0 (ph 519 531-1905; facebook.com/canadabanana.ca).