

# Raising a Large Breed Chicken – Brahma and Cochin



Are you ready to add a large breed chicken to your flock? If you want a sweet, docile, cuddly hen, choose a large breed chicken. Brahas and Cochins come to mind when I think of large breed chickens. Many people ask me what is the best backyard breed of chicken to raise. However, I feel like that is such a personal question and depends on so many factors. Usually, my answer will be something along the line of, if you are looking for a good egg layer, choose a hybrid such as the Red or Black Star. If you want a calm, peaceful chicken, try the Buff Orpington.

## My Favorite Large Breed Chickens

For me, the favorite breed of chicken has long been the Brahma chicken. Beautiful to behold, the Brahma stands head and shoulders above the flock. A large chicken, the Brahma is

pleasant to have around with a friendly disposition. Many people have a favorite chicken in their flock or a favorite breed because of the way it looks or the high egg production. Some are excellent broody hens and raise chicks easily to add to the flock. I don't know exactly what drew me towards the Brahma chicken and raising Brahmas but the attraction has led me to gathering the Brahma chicken in three different colors, so far.

Another favorite of mine is the Cochin breed. This large breed chicken is a recent addition to our flock with three Partridge Cochin hens. In our bantam coops we have several mottled Cochin chickens. We even have two Frizzled black Cochin and they are cute as they can be.

## **What Other Breeds are Large?**

When I think of a large breed chicken, the Cochin and the Brahma are the breeds I consider. Some people will include other large meat breeds in the category of large breed chicken. You may find Jersey Giant, Orpingtons, and Cornish Game in this category. While these breeds can be rather large, weighing in over 8 pounds, they are dwarfed in comparison to the Brahma and Cochin. Perhaps the Brahma and Cochin should be called Jumbo Chicken Breeds!



## The Brahma

The exact origin of the Brahma chicken is not well documented. The name is from the Brahmaputra River in India. Some guess that the Brahma chicken was developed from the Chinese Shanghai and the Chittagongs during the early days of settlement in California. The Brahma chicken breed has been recognized in the American Poultry Association since 1874.



Timber Creek Farm

## **On the Plus Side for Brahmas**

Brahma Chickens are adaptable to most climates. You might guess that with their heavy body and thick feathering, they would be intolerant to heat but I have not found this to be true. We routinely have days in the 90's during the summer and the Brahma hens do not pant or show any more distress than any other birds in our flock. Providing shade for all chickens is necessary anyway. On the other hand, as one might guess, Brahmas are very cold tolerant. The heavy weight and the feather covering on the legs helps it deal with cold temperatures. Egg laying during cold weather is good too.

## **How Big are They?**

The Brahma chicken breed stands out because of it's large sized birds. The roosters can weigh up to 12 pounds. Hens usually weigh close to 10 pounds. A bantam variety of Brahma chicken is also available. These miniature Brahmas weigh in around one pound or less.

## **Egg Laying?**

Does the Brahma chicken lay a lot of eggs? The Brahma chicken breed was primarily used as a meat chicken, and with the roosters weighing a huge 12 pounds or more, that is understandable. I do not raise chickens for meat so all of my Brahma chickens are kept as egg layers or chicken eye candy. They do lay eggs for us too, and while they are not consistent on a daily basis, they do gift us with enough eggs to earn their keep. Occasionally, the Brahmas will go broody and are good broody hens.

## **What Color is the Brahma Chicken**

Brahmas can be found in four colors: black, buff, dark, and white. More often the white variety is referred to as a light Brahma chicken. I am happy to own three of the four colors of the breed. I have not even seen a black Brahma chicken in real

life but when I do, you can be sure I will be trying to purchase some hatching eggs to complete my collection!

## **The Cochin**

The Livestock Conservancy has the Cochin chicken status listed as recovering. Once an extremely popular breed in the mid 1800's, the fact that the Cochin does not lay a high number of eggs per year, lowered it's popularity. Cochins are great at being broody hens, lay eggs reliably through the winter and are quiet chickens.



### **Need a Broody Hen? Get a Cochin!**

The Cochin originated in China and was well received in America. The economic reality of raising Cochin hens, made them less likely to be kept for egg production though. Since they may be the most broody chicken you ever raise, some

people will keep them for brooding larger egg fowl like turkeys and ducks. The disposition of the Cochin is top notch. Even the roosters rarely become rude and aggressive. The Cochin breed is a great choice if children are interested in helping to care for the flock.



our bantam cochin brooding eggs

## **Breed Size**

Due to their heavy size, the Cochin breed is easily contained in a fenced run. The Roosters can be up to 12 pounds and the hens easily reach 10 pounds. The breed is great at eating, so some supervised free ranging time would help keep the food bill lower.

## **Egg Laying**

Cochins lay approximately 150 to 160 eggs per year. The eggs

are brown and large in size.

## Varieties of Cochin Chickens

There are plenty of varieties to choose from in the Cochin breed. Black, partridge, blue, buff, silver laced, splash, golden laced, and white are usually easy to obtain. In both the full size and the bantam size frizzle characteristics can appear, where the feathers turn outward from the birds body. They are really quite stunning.



## Is a Large Breed Chicken Right for You?

Now that I have explained a little about what to expect in these chicken breeds, are large breed chicken varieties right for you? Some things to consider are the size of your coop, adequate sturdy roost bar, pop door opening, and the



size of the nesting boxes. Keep in mind that the Brahma or Cochin chicken is going to be almost twice the size of your other popular egg laying breed hens. Fitting into a small nesting box won't be easy or comfortable. If you have a small pop door, the Brahma might be scrapping her back feathers on the door every time she goes in or out of the coop.

Roosting at night will be a challenge if the existing roost bar is flimsy. I definitely suggest that you upgrade to a sturdy 2 x 4 roost bar for the Brahmas.

## **Egg Requirements**

If you are raising chickens strictly for eggs for your family, the large breed chicken is not a high egg production hen. They do lay a fair amount of eggs, but some people feel that the lower production than a Rhode Island Red, makes them undesirable for a backyard homestead.

## **Large Breed Chicken and Feathered Feet- a Bonus and a Curse**

The feathered legs and feet are a feature that I love. But, the heavy feathering does collect mud during a rainy season and need to be cleaned from time to time for comfort and hygiene reasons. Also, during the winter, snow and ice can accumulate in the feathered feet and cause problems. Checking the large breed chicken's feet may often be necessary.



## Temperament

The Brahmas we have had a range in temperament from shy to very friendly and curious. Our Cochins have been rather shy so far. As they get closer to laying, they are getting easier to approach and handle. Since they are so large, it isn't too hard to catch them if I need to. I have not had an aggressive or mean Brahma in the flock. Some will even come up to me and beg for attention. Another plus, since they don't object too much to being held, and they can't run as fast as the lighter breeds, making them easier to catch!

So what do you think? Are you ready to raise a a large breed chicken?

