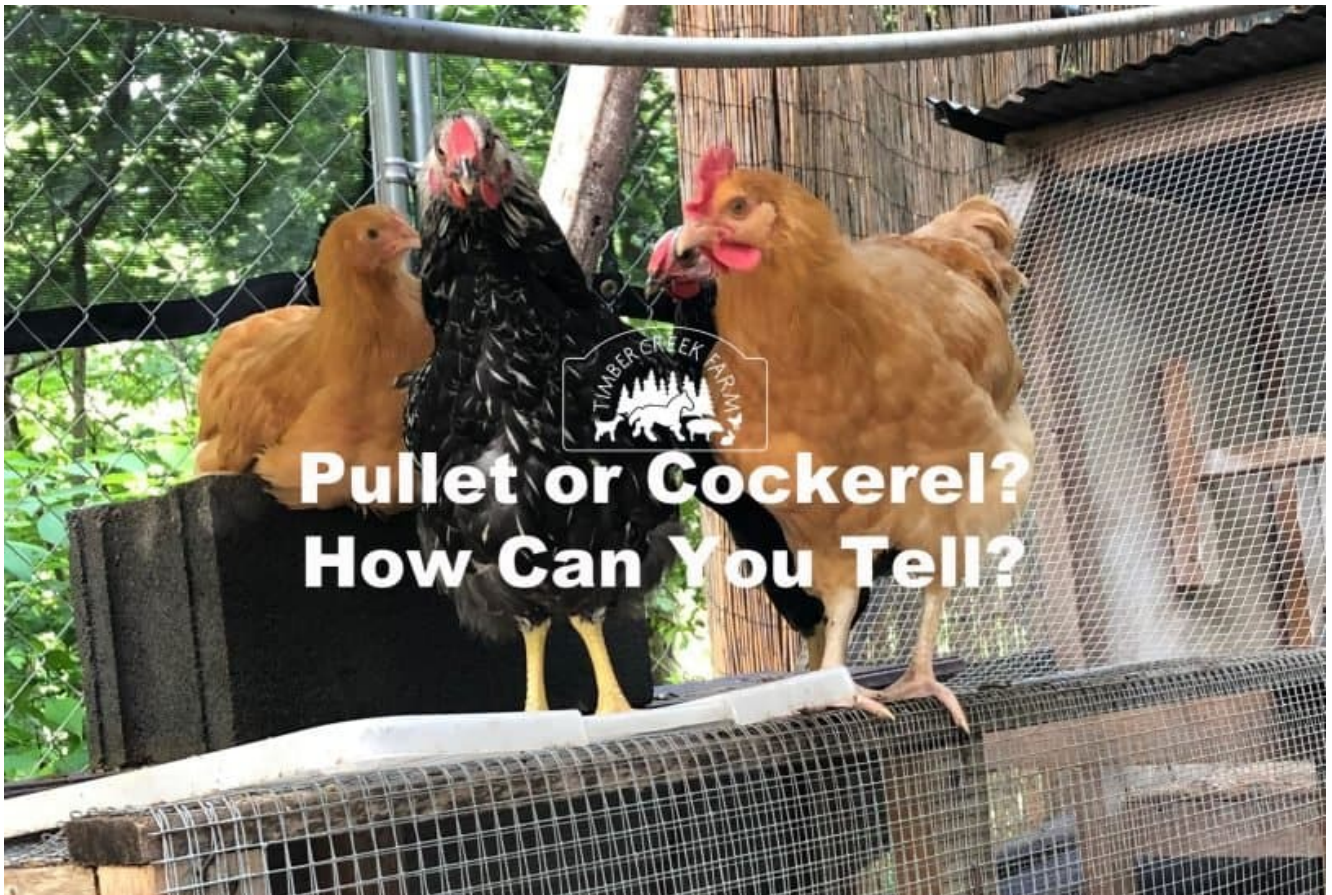


# Pullet or Cockerel? How to Know



Are some of your chickens looking different than the others? Do you know how to determine, early on, if you are raising a pullet or a cockerel? Lets say you wanted to raise chickens for eggs and purchased some hatching eggs. Or, perhaps, you couldn't resist the fluffy little munchkins at the feed store this spring. In any event you now have chickens growing up in your backyard. You are feeding them and caring for their every need. But wait! Some of the chicks are starting to look different than the others. One or two in particular seem, odd. Could they be roosters? There are ways to identify the pullet or cockerel as they develop.

# Pullet or Cockerel – How to Know the Difference



There are a few ways to sex chicks and maturing chickens. At hatching the method that has been used for generations is called vent sexing. Sometimes it is referred to as the Japanese method. Using this method, look inside the tiny vent opening and notice the difference in the cloaca. I have not seen this done but hatcheries use this method with 85 to 90 % accuracy.



## Wing Feather Sexing

Another method is wing feather sexing. Look at the wing feathers of a chick on the first or second day after hatching. Cockerel chickens wing feathers would be all the same length. Pullets wing feathers would be in two layers of different length. A note of caution on this method. It does not work on all breeds of chickens. Certain breeds such as leghorns have the genetic trait that allows this method to be used. Not all breeds have this trait.





## Sex Linked Breeds

**Sex Linked Traits** – For certain genetic pairings, a predictable and identifiable appearance gives a fool proof method of determining sex of the chick. For this method you need to understand that the hen contributes genetic material to the cockerels and the rooster contributes genetic material to the pullets. Any sex linked characteristics will be passed on in this way. Color is one of the sex linked traits.

Knowing this, if you mate a hen that carries a sex linked color trait with a rooster that does not carry the trait, the cockerels will have the trait. This makes it easy to separate the pullets at hatching. There are some popular hybrid breeds

that utilize this method. Black Stars or Black Sex links are the result of a Barred Rock Hen crossed with a Rhode Island Red Rooster. The cockerels have a white spot on their heads. Red Stars and Golden Comets are two other breeds that are bred for this reason and for increased egg production.



#### Black Star or Black Sex Link Hen

If you absolutely cannot have a rooster or don't want to deal with one, buying sex linked breed pullets is your most fool proof method of obtaining pullets. Using this genetic makeup to choose your flock helps you avoid the hassle and heartbreak of having to re-home or cull a backyard pet. If you are living a self sufficient lifestyle, and utilizing the protein provided from your flock, you might consider roosters as an additional meat. I realize this is a sensitive subject for many backyard chicken keepers and culling rooster for the stew pot is not something all chicken keepers can handle. Keep reading for more on re-homing roosters.

## Developing chicks



As your chicks develop, you may begin to notice some differences in the growth and characteristics showing up. The two chickens shown in the photo are showing classic developmental differences between a pullet and a cockerel. The young cockerel grew up to be the best rooster we ever had on the farm. I am glad that the hatchery made that error and sent us King!

Cockerels will often hold themselves differently, in a more upright stance. Their neck feathers will be longer and pointy as compared to the more rounded feather ends of the pullets. The combs and legs will also begin to look different. Combs on a developing cockerel will be darker colored, and larger than the pullets of the same breed. By ten weeks of age, you can be fairly certain if you have a developing rooster in the flock.

## The Crowing and the Egg





Of course, the final answer to the question comes when you find the egg. Or the morning noon and night crowing that is hard to dispute. Although, hens of some breeds, in the absence of a rooster may take up crowing.

One last anecdotal test. I have found that my roosters are often the chicks that were the most easily handled and didn't mind being cuddled. It doesn't last though! Somewhere around 8 months to a year, the hormones fully kick in and the rooster is no longer so cuddly. Before that point be sure you have made it clear that you are in charge. Roosters will look for weakness and begin to strike out when you enter the area where the hens are housed. You can read more about keeping roosters and tips for success in this post.



## Re-Homing Roosters

If you are totally against using your roosters as food for your family, re-homing is another option that may work out. There are people with larger flocks that keep roosters for protection of the hens. I would check with a local feed store or agriculture supply store about a community bulletin board. Posting your available rooster there might bring some leads. When the rooster is a particular breed, posting on a local community forum might lead you to someone who is looking for a new breeding rooster. It's not easy to re-home a rooster. Occasionally the right person comes along and all ends well.





**Pullet  
or  
Cockerel?  
who's  
joining  
the flock?**

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