

Can Turkeys and Ducks Live Together?



Four years ago we found out whether turkeys and ducks can live together. After raising a pair of turkeys from poults we decided to breed them instead of eat them. The issue then, was where to house them. The turkeys had outgrown their grow out pen and needed a permanent place to live. Moving in with the ducks seemed like a probable solution. And it worked for a time. And then things went down hill fast. Let me tell you the story of Gus and Greta, our Naragansett breeding pair.

A decision to raise a few turkeys for our family freezer or table led to keeping two turkeys to breed for hatching eggs. After buying the turkey poults, we ended up with only two. They developed into a beautiful Hen and Tom. We didn't intend to get attached. They were kept in a different pen than the ducks and chickens who are kept for eggs. We tried not to notice how friendly and calm they were. We really tried to think about how delicious they would be on our table. We even told our family that this would lead to our Thanksgiving dinner centerpiece.

But, as time drew close and decision time drew near, we couldn't do it. Gus and Greta Turkey had crossed that line and become part of the family. I placed my order for a free range turkey for Thanksgiving.



So, now the dilemma was what to do with Gus and Greta. You see, they had outgrown their pen which would have been the perfect size had they lived out their initial life expectancy and become dinner. A lot of options were discussed. Fortunately we have plenty of space. Unfortunately we do not have a lot of time. Building a new building at this time was not going to happen. The Ducks had recently taken up residence in the new Duck Home. It is spacious, low to the ground, and includes a covered pen. Plenty of room for two gentle turkeys to join the Ducks.

We also raise chickens for eggs. Housing turkeys and chickens together however can be a problem due to the possibility of Blackhead disease.

The Turkeys packed up their feed bowl and water fount and moved across the street (ok not really a street, just a path between the coops) and moved in with the Ducks. The Turkeys moved in and the Ducks ran into the house and refused to come out. We were thankful that there was no aggression. Although,

I didn't expect any. Both groups were extremely gentle. But now we had Ducks in the Duck house crowded into a corner and Turkeys standing in their new pen looking confused and lost. Turkeys and ducks living together? Not really. No Welcome Wagon, no here's a cake we baked, welcome to the neighborhood. Nothing.

And to add to the drama, the Turkeys decided they liked the end of the pen with the swimming pool. So the Ducks just stayed inside, occasionally looking out longingly at their pool. The ducks were not willing to get to know the large newcomers.

By day three, I tried to intervene. I could get the Ducks to leave the house with appropriate treats used as a bribe but as soon as either turkey would so much as look at them, the Ducks would run back inside.

By day four, the Ducks were getting used to Gus and Greta Turkey. I even saw them eating out of the same food bowl! For one split second anyway, until the duck realized what was happening and ran back in the house.

Turkeys and ducks settle down differently at night too. The Turkeys liked to roost, but not until they had strutted around inside the house a while, inadvertently shepherding the ducks from one corner to the next. The ducks tuck themselves into corners or snuggle against the walls on the floor.



I knew we were on the way to complete acceptance. And, at least there was no blood or aggression to deal with. The ducks had resumed laying eggs and peace was returning to their

lives. I thought maybe the Ducks would soon reclaim the pool and go for a swim!



The Rest of the Story of Turkeys and Ducks

Happily Ever After... Not so fast. Just when you think you've set up a wonderful idyllic habitat for your animals to live in and Bam! Something goes wrong. In this case, after only two weeks of turkeys and ducks living together, my husband found two ducks in not so great shape. One had a wound on her wing

but otherwise no major damage. The other ducky was found soaking wet, covered in mud and unable to move. Our first thought, after drying them off and taking inventory of symptoms and wounds, was that they got in a fight with each other. At the time neither one had been laying eggs yet, so we thought they were boy ducks (these were the first Pekins we owned and I did not know to look for the tail curl). We dried off the wet duck, set up a crate with a heat lamp and lots of dry straw and made (him) comfortable. (S)he drank some water and we thought He (she) had just lost the fight. As the day went on he (she) recovered a bit and we closed them up at night with high hopes for a full recovery.



Early the next morning, I let everyone, including the injured duck, out in the yard while I cleaned up and filled feed bowls. I turned around and noticed that the turkey hen was quietly attacking the injured duck. What a bully! I grabbed up the victim and proceeded to separate the turkeys and the ducks. While cleaning up the crate, I found an egg! Apparently, I did not guess the sex of the Pekins correctly. Out of the three Pekins we were raising, all three turned out to be hens. At least with the Rouens the males and females look different!

Anyway, back to the story of the living arrangements. I mentioned this to a few poultry raising friends and found out that turkey hens can be quite aggressive. We had just added on the duck pen and duck house, and then added another pen to give them more room. It looked fantastic. Now we had to figure out a new housing plan for Gus and Greta. The turkeys and ducks would not be living together.

I was disappointed that our beautiful plan to house the turkeys and ducks had to be altered. The whole incident stepped on my vision of the animals peacefully living together in harmony. Looking back, I think if we had been free ranging

the birds then, this might have worked out better. Although the space was ample, it was also good for hens setting territory. I think the turkeys missed interacting with the ducks. I was unwilling to take chances on finding wounded ducks again. Animals react on instinct and whatever it was that made Greta attack the ducks we will never know. The thing is though, these animals were mine to care for and protect. We had to come up with a plan. After a few days of trying different arrangements, we even considered re-evaluating the decision to not cook the turkeys. But then inspiration struck.



The duck house had two pens and two doors. What if we put a fence down the middle of the house. The turkeys could use one door and one pen. The ducks could use the other door and other

pen. Eureka! The turkeys and ducks could still live together. We even made the inside fence removable for easy cleaning.

Our initial disappointment at the squabbling led to an even better arrangement. Life is crazy, uncertain and ever changing. Enjoy the peaceful moments and be flexible because challenges will come.

