

WADDLESTON Q. DUCK

We raise chickens for fun and eggs. Our flock has become part of our extended family. In exchange for their entertainment and eggs, we feed, water and protect them.

We've fenced $\frac{1}{4}$ acre for the chicken yard, but, our feathered children can scratch and peck freely within our 3 acres. A 5:1 ratio of hens to roosters is acceptable and 8:1 ideal. We struggle with too many roosters, so we try to add hens not roosters.

Occasionally, we adopt baby chicks from the feed store or from a hatchery. When we adopt from stores, they're separated by breed and gender – pullets, cockerels or gender unknown. We can pick them up, hold them, check them out. Our experience has been that this method is about 50% accurate: 50% of pullets are really roosters.

When we adopt from the hatchery, we order on-line, specifying breed and gender. Adding hens this way is 80% – 90% accurate. Just one day old, our new babies are shipped by USPS overnight special delivery. Since baby chicks chill easily, hatcheries “rooster-fill” orders, adding free baby cockerels for body mass and warmth.

Spring 2006, I insisted my hatchery order NOT be rooster-filled. Much to my surprise, when I opened the box from the hatchery, one baby clearly was NOT a chick. Instead of rooster-filling my order, they duckling-filled it!

Waddleston Q. Duck, as he became named, had a diverse instant family – 23 chicks, 5 turkey poults and him.

We worried that being the only duck, he'd be left out, maybe even picked on. But, quite to the contrary, Waddleston was an instant celebrity! He grew faster than the others so they followed him endlessly. When he went swimming, they waited around the water's edge for him. They even slept with him, jumping off their roosts to be closer.

While we found this quite amusing, we believed that as he grew, he'd realize that he was like the ducks that swam in the pond next door. When his hormones kicked in, we'd expected to lose him to duck sweetheart.

I believe, adult Waddleston Q. Duck thinks he's a chicken. Everyday we have ducks fly onto our property. Waddleston is totally oblivious to their presence. Instead, he spends everyday with his childhood pullet friends Neowana, Yashada and Yodavi. Often roosters choose special hen girlfriends. Their girlfriend lays an egg, they crow proudly, announcing it's arrival into the world and her phenomenal accomplishment. Similarly, when Waddleston's hen girlfriends lay eggs, he waddles in a circle and quacks happily.

I give thanks for my duck-filled order and the lessons it surprisingly contained. Waddleston has made me review my beliefs around nature versus nurture. I think I've mostly believed nurture or environment is the stronger determinant of who I am and the life I've chosen. Watching Waddleston, I'm sure of it!

