

# Guinea Fowl: Reducing Parasites and Pests

One of the ways that you can reduce ticks and other insects on your farm is to raise guinea fowl. While they have some disadvantages - they can be noisy and they are a little tricky to raise - they are, on the other hand, interesting, friendly and have an appetite for bugs, including Lyme ticks. Contrary to popular opinion, they are quite intelligent.

## *Fowl or Hens?*

Quite often, people refer to all Guinea fowl as “Guinea Hens.” This is technically incorrect because only the females are hens.

## *Are Guinea Fowl For You?*

Once you raise your Guinea fowl, they are to be released in to the wild (on the outskirts of your farm) where they will live. Since they are territorial they will remain within close proximity of the area in which they are released.

It takes a little bit of effort to raise Guinea fowl so here are some points to consider:

- Do you have the environment/space for them? They will range over about 3 to 5 acres.
- They prefer open areas, not woods.
- They are sure to make a racket at times.
- Guinea fowl are relatively clean, but, as with any animal, they do leave droppings.
- Does your local zoning prohibit Guineas? Visit our website to read about our struggle to keep our birds.
- Do you have access to a feed store for supplies and feed?

## *Getting Started*

You need to have a source of supply, which can be tough. Usually the babies, known as keets, are available around April. They have a high attrition rate, so



buy at least 15 or 20 for your first time. Prices should be approximately \$3-5 each. Do some web searching for a supplier in your local area. Most feed stores will either sell keets or they will be able to tell you who does.

You will need a place to raise your Guinea fowl until their feathers come in. A large metal tub with a chicken wire covering (they learn to fly quickly), a heat lamp, a watering trough, clean bedding and starter feed are all necessary. Keep them in a quiet, draft free environment. You will probably need to dip the young birds beaks in the water until they get the hang of drinking.

It helps to acclimatize the birds if you talk to them every day. They will get to know your voice which will, in the long term, keep them closer to your property.

## *Moving Them Outside*

Once their new feathers come in, and the weather is a bit warmer (at least 50 degrees or so at night), you can move your Guinea fowl to a cage outside. Most feed stores will have hutches that you can purchase for about \$100. Check your cage carefully to ensure it is sturdy. Raccoons, possums and everything else will want to get at the keets. Make sure they have fresh straw or hay for bedding. Ensure they have plenty of water and feed - your feed store should have starter mash. Finally, make sure that part of the hutch is shielded so your keets can avoid the drafts at night.

*Gardening With Guineas - A Step by Step Guide to Raising Guinea Fowl*

## *Backyard Battle Plan*

Control animals that will attack your guinea fowl and chickens – and may also carry ticks. It is wise to set a large Havahart trap near the hutch every night. Bait it with tuna, veggies or otherwise. The idea is to reduce the raccoon and possum population before you start releasing the birds. Caution: read up on rabies and raccoon parasites carefully before setting any traps. Check your local ordinances and with your animal control officer as to any legal requirements. (It is often illegal to release certain animals.) Do not release the trapped animals elsewhere, as you might spread rabies.

## *Releasing Your Guinea Fowl*

This is a tricky part. If you release them all at one time, they may wander off forever. The best bet is to release one or two. The released birds will hang near the others in the hutch. After dusk, you will find them roosting on the ground nearby. At this time, capture the released Guinea from the top so they can't open their wings - you should be able to do so without hurting them. Wear heavy leather gloves as their claws and beaks are sharp – plus, they tend to poop when excited. Put them back in to the cage and let another pair out the next day.



The more they are outside, the more they will grow. As they grow, they will become old enough to eat Layer Pellets (food for domestic chickens). They are extremely vulnerable until they learn how to get away from hawks, cats, coons and other predators. They are most vulnerable when they are bedded down as a group at night.

By the time keets are one-month-old, they develop their first set of feathers. In the pearl variety, these feathers will be camouflage-brown. Later, gray feathers will appear, letting you know your keets are ready to fend for themselves on the open range and can all be released.

One hard learned lesson to heed: do not release young birds on days of heavy rain. They cannot fly when their feathers are wet and they will probably settle wherever they happen to be which leaves them quite vulnerable.

The adolescents are vulnerable at night until they learn to roost in the trees. That will usually be after several of

them get killed on the ground.

The adults, however, require very little care. One bird of the flock will eventually become the alpha male. It is a good idea to feed them a little bit of layer feed every day in the summer. Do not feed them too much or they won't eat the bugs. Leave water out for them regularly. In the winter, you will have leave plenty of water and chicken feed out for them.

In really cold, wintry weather you may need to capture them and bring them into a shed. You can usually do this with a large towel. Treat them gently and don't hang them by their feet like you can hang a chicken (a chicken will usually go limp when carried this way).



### ***Guinea Fowl and Children***

These birds are pretty safe around children, but I would use caution with toddlers and infants. Also, prevent any children from chasing the birds.

### ***Results***

The end result of raising Guineas is that they are a lot of fun to have around. The bonus is that the bug population in the immediate area will be drastically reduced.

Celebrities Christie Brinkley and Billy Joel commissioned a study of the effectiveness of guinea fowl in reducing lyme ticks. The Duffy Study showed a clear correlation between guinea fowl and reduced deer tick populations as well.

*Additional information on guinea fowl can be found on-line at:  
<http://www.motherearthnews.com>*

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