

Gail's free ranging turkeys.

We raise turkeys every year.

A few to eat ourselves, and twenty or so for customers.

I have raised many breeds of turkeys but the common "Broad Breasted" turkeys work out the best.

They are reasonably hardy for turkeys.

Turkeys are nowhere near as hardy as ducks and geese.

The Broad Breasted birds grow slowly for about three months.

Then, they can grow to enormous size in the next three to six months.

We have had turkeys surpass 50 pounds live weight by Christmas.

On average, we try to produce turkeys that are around 20 pounds, dressed, in time for Thanksgiving.

Free range turkeys will spread out in growth rate.

In a flock that averages 20 pounds, a few may weigh 15 pounds, and a couple will dress around 30 pounds.

I normally buy both the White and Bronze varieties.

Of course, the Bronze look like Thanksgiving Turkeys.

Other than feather color, the two varieties are identical.

White turkeys, like white chickens and white poultry of any kind, were primarily developed because they are easier to process.

It is easier to make a white bird look cleanly plucked than a bird with dark feathers.

Especially with automatic plucking machinery.

The White Tom Turkey in the first photo is "displaying".

Birds of many species display and "strut" to attract females.

Peacocks are probably the best-known example after turkeys.

This white Tom has kept his plumage remarkably clean and unbroken.

The second photo shows eleven turkeys of both color variations, free ranging on the farmstead. The flock, with a few adopted chickens, range pretty far.



Gail always locks them in a secure, outside pen at night. Far ranging would not work in the spring, when the turkeys are much smaller, and the foxes and coyotes are feeding their young. Even now, a coyote would probably grab them in the night, if they could.



The night pens are always covered with light fabric mesh to protect from owls. Owls will snap the heads off of young poultry night after night, if they can get to them. Usually, that is all the owls eat, the heads I mean. When desperately hungry, owls will attach large turkeys. They cannot eat them, and for turkeys over 10 pounds they can seldom kill them, but the viscous (or courageous) predators will chew on the necks to de-capitate the birds. At least twice we have had turkeys and owls fight to the death of the owl. Gail insists that I harvest her Thanksgiving turkey on Thanksgiving morning. She wants it fresh.

Consumers are accustomed to starting the cooking process with frozen or refrigerated meat. Do you know that meat of all types, cooks in half the time when still naturally warm? A field dressed rabbit will cook in minutes over a campfire. People are funny about fresh meat, though.

Gail's Mom would not eat any meat that had not spent time in a deep freeze. The good woman raised nine kids on a farm.

The third photo shows the turkeys climbing on Gail's Farmall Cub tractor and very rare, but totally functional IH Model 100 Manure Spreader.

She uses it almost daily.

The fourth photo shows the white Tom, a disinterested bronze Tom to the right, and an equally disinterested white hen to the left.



I get the impression that he is not her type.

Of course, it could be that she is just not in the mood.

I can assure you; he will keep trying.

Hens are somewhat smaller than toms, with less "flesh" around their heads and necks.

These turkeys, like all of our animals, have a very good life.

Tom.