



Practice Limited to Birds, Reptiles and Exotics

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## **Duck Care Sheet**

This sheet has information relevant to Mallard, Peking, Muscovy, and Crested Ducks. If cared for properly, ducks can make excellent pets and live 10-15 years. Ducks naturally gravitate to lakes, ponds, streams, rivers, and marshes and their habitat should reflect this. Domestic ducks need human interaction and enrichment. These birds are entertaining, interactive, vocal animals that can form strong bonds with their owners.

### **Sexing & Behavior**

Sexing by plumage color is dependent on age, species, and season. Most ducks may be sexed by their voices from the time they are about 6 weeks old. The females will quack loudly while the males make a soft, muffled, hoarse sound. Male ducks, also known as drakes, acquire a curled tail feather called a drake feather when they mature. Male Muscovy ducks are 30-50% larger than females. Ducks spend most of their time foraging for food and swimming. Males can be territorial and should be watched for signs of aggression.

### **Housing**

Ideal captive housing is a clean, dry, warm shelter within an area to roam safely (pen or fenced yard) with a pond. A 3-4-sided enclosure is best with sides and top secure enough to keep out predators. A minimum of 3 feet high and 6 square feet per duck is recommended. Concrete floors allow for easy cleaning, but must be covered with a substrate such as hay, straw, or peat moss to prevent pressure sores from forming. Substrate should be spot cleaned daily and completely changed out once a week. Water for swimming and playing with a ramp for access must be provided and water should be changed when cloudy. The Muscovy also requires a place for perching. Supplemental heat should be provided in the winter using an outdoor heating pad or infrared or ceramic bulb positioned above one end of the enclosure and placed on the outside to prevent burns. Shelters should be provided and must be insulated to be both water- and wind-proof. Shade and plentiful water should be available in the summer.

### **Diet**

Free-range ducks are omnivores and eat leaves, stems, flowers, roots, seeds, aquatic plants, snails, and insects. In captivity, ducks should be fed a pellet or mash diet. Ducklings need 18-22% protein as a starter feed, juveniles need 17% protein, and adults need 14-16% protein which should be increased to 16-18% protein when laying eggs. Adult ducks should be supplemented with calcium in the form of oyster shells, chopped hard boiled eggs with the shell left on, and/or a cuttle bone. Shredded vegetables like carrots and leafy greens should also be provided, and insects like mealworms, night crawlers, and bloodworms can be offered. ***Bread, scratch, grains, seeds, nuts, chocolate, and foods high in fat, sugar, or salt should never be fed to ducks.*** These can all lead to illness. Uneaten food should be removed daily. Unlimited access to non-medicated fresh water is essential.

***We strongly recommend annual health examinations on all exotics!***

