

## Washing Show Poultry

By Matt Lhamon

I first wrote this article in 1990 and have updated it several times over the years. Thinking back, I have been washing show poultry since 1972, 49 years. I have learned a few things that work and many that did not work so well. When I moved to my current home about 9 years ago, I had a plan in mind to design my last and best chicken facility. I wanted to make the washing process of the birds as easy and as simple as possible as my partner Mike Sayre and I have been known to wash as many as 50 birds for a show. I believe it was "Doc" Patterson who said, "only wash the ones you want to win!"

I wanted one of those commercial three tub stainless steel sinks like I used while in the restaurant business. I watched For Sale ads and Craigslist till I found one and as luck would have it, it was near Mike Sayre in Toledo, Ohio so I sent him to get it. Once I had it installed and up and running it has proven to be a great time saver and I believe proper washing makes the difference between a winner and a loser.



Each one of the tubs holds about 7-8 gallons of water. All three tubs are filled with warm water that I would say is 98-100 degrees. In the first tub, I add a dosing cup 6-8 oz. of Tide Oxi or Tide Hygienic Clean liquid laundry detergent. We use Tide formulas for many reasons. The first one is the new formulas are very low sudsing so the work well in high efficiency washing machines which makes them rinse very clean unlike some of the soaps and shampoos of earlier years. The second is they contain chemicals and enzymes which destroy dirt along with brighteners to intensify the white or light-colored areas of the bird. I also put only two caps full of Mrs. Stewart's bluing in the water and make sure it is completely mixed up. This a new addition as I was always afraid of bluing as I have judged many birds over blued! This amount in 7-8 gallons of water, seems to make the birds glow when dried.



I immerse the bird up to its neck in this mixture, thoroughly soaking the feathers and set a timer for five minutes for a white bird and 2.5 minutes for a colored bird. This is to let the mixture and chemicals work on cleaning the bird. After the timer goes off, then I use a soft plastic bristle vegetable type brush to scrub the bird really good always working with the lay of the feathers. Once the bird has been scrubbed thoroughly, I clean the head and feet with an old tooth brush dipped in the soap mixture. In the second tub, I use only clean water and no white vinegar. I used to use white vinegar to help cut the suds but there is no need for it with these new soap formulas. I find after many years of using it, vinegar dries out the feathers and dulls the shine when the bird dries. Dip and soak all areas of the bird in the clean water of the second tub and you can feel when you have all the soap out as the bird will be squeaky clean when you squeegee the water out of their feather before the final step. In the third tub I use about 8-10oz of Glycerin to 7-8 gallons of water to restore oil and luster to the feathers. Dip the bird and let it immerse for 30 seconds or so. Squeegee as much water as

you can from the feathers and wrap in a bath towel to dry. I will wash several birds till the water is dirty and needs changed before I start to dry them.



Towel dry and leave the bird dry in the sun or under heat lamp till completely dry. I am lucky my building is heated and I towel dry the feathers really good and turn heat up to 75 degrees and put the birds in special cages to dry overnight. We do occasional use a dog type blower to dry the birds and fluff them up after overnight drying in the cages.

White birds should be washed about 3 days before the show, colored birds about 7 days. I only use a blow dryer on my Cochins and then only to fluff the bird up after it has dried naturally for awhile. Poor washing/drying job will do more harm than good to the bird, take your time and wash well getting all stains and dirt out, rinse well and get all the suds out and let the bird dry naturally so it can get its feathers back in place. Keep your show boxes full of fresh clean shavings as many a properly washed bird has been ruined in transport to the show. Never enter more birds in the than you are willing to wash!

When washing a dark colored or dark colored hard feathered breed of bantams I make a few adjustments. If the bird is really dirty, I may soak him in the tub for 2.5 to 5 minutes or so always holding on and keeping his head above the water. Once the feathers are thoroughly soaked, I scrub the body, head and feet areas like mentioned above. The second, third and drying steps are the same as above except dark colored birds dry fast in the sun or under a heat lamp so make sure they do not get too hot and overheat. I like to do this a week before the show so the bird can get their feathers back in place and never blow-dry a hard feathered bird.

If the bird is not real dirty, I use the same process but use little or no soap in the first tub. A poorly washed hard feathered bird will look like a frizzle so make sure if you use any soap, it is all rinsed out. Again, keep the show boxes dust free and full of fresh shavings so the bird does not get dusty or dirty in route to the show.

This is revision 2021 of my bird washing article that is now 31 years old. We can always learn something new and those that are successfully are always looking for better ways of doing things! One of my favorite sayings, "Everyone wants to shine but few are willing to polish."