

A Treat A Day Keeps the Boredom Away



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I love to feed people. So I guess it should be no big surprise that I also like to feed my farm animals. And by feed, I don't just mean the obligatory act of filling feed bowls. No indeed. I am referring to the sharing moments when my ducks actually run towards me instead of away. The gleeful noises made by the chickens when they see me walking up with a plate of leftover food from our table. And the way a tasty treat turns an unruly goat into a pile of mushy goat love. Yes, my friends, I spoil my animals. It is actually hard for me to walk out of my house without a treat for the barnyard residents. I know they will be disappointed if I show up empty handed. I can see it in their eyes. So in addition to

their regular crumbles and pelleted rations, I bring them treats.



I save the stale crackers, leftover salad, vegetable scraps, day old spaghetti, week old mac and cheese and weeds from the garden plots. What? Weeds are a treat? Yes, to my ducks they are. Pretty much anything green gets them quacking. Luckily, we normally have mild weather even if it isn't warm enough to garden. The weeds apparently have no reluctance to grown in the winter. I harvest the greens in buckets and keep them in the feed shed. When its time for a treat,

I grab a big old handful of weedy delight and put the weeds in a bowl of warm water for the ducks. And the chickens and turkeys love them too. I think what is growing now is chick weed. How appropriate. In between our mini snow storms I gather up the buckets of green weeds. It is a free supplement to the household leftover, and it's totally free. Please be sure to know the types of weeds you have growing, because some weeds can be toxic. Two good resources are Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens, and The Chicken Encyclopedia, both by Gail Damerow.

The ducks are discerning treat eaters. They won't even touch bread, so I don't know where that idea originated. The pasta scraps aren't very interesting to them either. But bring them some leftover green beans, or canned mixed veggies and watch out! I become the super hero of duck owners. Cooked peas? Yes please. Romaine lettuce? Don't need to ask them twice. In fact romaine lettuce is something the ducks will eat out of my hands.





The chickens definitely live up to their omnivore status. The funniest thing to bring them is leftover spaghetti. It must look just like a pile of worms! Appetizing thought there. Sorry. Lettuce and all salad food is another big hit at the coop dining table. I always make the salad extra big so there is plenty leftover! Rice is popular here too. The chickens see no need to refuse an occasional slice of stale bread or crackers. When the kids are around and I have cooked a big breakfast, the chickens get one of the favorite treats – scrambled eggs. Please don't tell them where the scrambled eggs come from, OK? It will be our secret.



My goats are another story. The goats don't seem to like very many treats. The dry leaves on the ground seem to be a delicacy however. But, I did find a couple of things that get their attention. Unfortunately, they do have to be purchased first, so not truly recycling. The best treat, according to the herd, is whole peanuts in the shell. Yup they eat them just the way they are. Crunch

crunch. Whole peanuts are the best treat and we use them especially during shearing season and when trimming hooves. The only other treat I have seen them really go for is vanilla wafers. And we have a couple that like peppermint lifesavers.

We don't spend much money or store bought treats around here. There seems to be enough real food to keep the flocks and herd happy and their bellies content.



Gail Damerow, in her book, [The Chicken Encyclopedia](#), recommends the following when deciding which scraps and people food to take to your flock.

“Avoid any strong smelling or tasting foods as they may cause the eggs to have an off flavor. Avocados and guacamole can be deadly to chickens so avoid this. Stay away from too many sweets, including sugar substitutes or foods high in fat, uncooked potatoes, and uncooked beans. Most importantly, treats are treats because we are to use them sparingly. Treats and table scraps should make up no more than 10% of the animals diet. Use good judgement and your animals and birds will enjoy the extra snacks you give for many years!”



Brought out of the archives, updated and improved! I hope you enjoy this blast from the past.