

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. Prepare your heart. My friends, chicks are hitting feed stores across the country. The time has come and while we're not getting laying hens this year, mostly because I went on numerous shopping sprees last year because the chicks were 50% off and I have no self control. We are going to get meat birds again this year. We didn't get them last year because basically we just got behind the eight ball. I'm not going to give you any other sort of fancy excuse. We just didn't get our act together and I'm really, really missing the homegrown chicken. So if you've pondered adding meat chickens into your homestead, it can really fit in most locations, even in a backyard in the suburbs if your HOA will allow. We're going to dive into the ins and outs of meat chickens in today's episode. I'm your host Jill Winger, and this is the podcast for the trailblazers, the Mavericks, the makers, the homesteaders, the modern pioneers, and the backyard farmers.

Speaker 1 ([01:10](#)):

If you've ever found yourself disenchanted with conformity and you kinda like to swim upstream while the rest of society rides the river of least resistance, well you have found your tribe. I feel like we're still a little bit newbies kind of newbies in the world of meat chickens because the first, I don't know, half of our homestead journey, we didn't raise chickens for meat. We only had layers. The reason being is that Christian had this very strange poultry allergy. It was this thing where, I can't remember the name, I think it's called oral allergy syndrome. It's, it's really, that's more of a description of the symptoms. It's not really a great diagnosis cause the doctors still don't really understand it. But when he eats certain foods, primarily raw fruits and vegetables and chicken, his throat, like it feels like he say my throat hurts and he would eventually, if he ate enough of the food, he would throw up.

Speaker 1 ([02:14](#)):

Like it was this really weird thing. And so we dealt with that for a long time. Oddly enough, he was able to clear up that reaction, allergy, whatever it was through acupuncture. It's this technique called NAET. And I cannot tell you the what like the words behind the acronym because it's really hard to pronounce. It's basically a allergy elimination technique. If you Google it, you'll find it NAET but anyway, the doctor tests you and then he does acupuncture for the certain allergens and I have no idea how it works, but it worked. And since he had treatments, for chicken through this doctor, he has been able to eat chicken. So it was definitely a celebratory day. The day we realized he could finally eat chicken because I missed cooking it for so many years.

Speaker 1 ([03:12](#)):

And we, we realized, Hey, we need to figure out how to raise some chicken cause we've been doing the pork, we've been doing the beef, time to raise a chicken. So anyway, it came a little bit later since then we try to get around 30 to 40 meat birds each year. And that's kind of a lower number, I feel like. Some homesteaders will do, you know, a hundred or 200 meat birds a year for us. You know, I think 50 is a great number if you're planning on a bird a week, right. We don't do chicken quite every single week. So every other week or, or you know, we skip a week here and there and 30 or 40 works just fine. And it's what we have freezer space for. So we get 30 ish, 40 ish birds, either from our local feed store, which can be a little bit tricky because driving into town and then sometimes they sell out before we get there and it's like tickle me Elmo.

Speaker 1 ([04:08](#)):

But with meat chickens and it's kind of annoying. But when I can grab them at the local feed store, I will. Otherwise I order them from Meyer hatchery and we've had pretty good luck having boxes of meat chickens mailed to us. It's a little bit stressful making sure they get into the post office and the post office contacts us correctly and doesn't leave them in the mail room for two nights and they die. But other than that, it's pretty easy. So either option works as far as the breed. I wanted to talk about this for a minute because this is actually a kind of a debated topic. I'm really, really good at finding strangely controversial topics within this idea of homegrown food. But I would say there's kind of two camps in the world of meat chickens. There's folks who are sold out, devoted to what you would call a freedom ranger or a red ranger variety, and they're more of a heritage breed of chicken.

Speaker 1 ([05:10](#)):

They're slower growing, but they have a little more of a natural instinct, meaning they can forage, they can hunt bugs, they'll go outside and they'll just act like more of a chicken that you would expect. The other camp, it would be the Cornish cross meat birds and Cornish cross. I just need to say they're not GMOs. People like they're GMO freaking birds. No, they're, they're not GMO. They are hybrids. And so they're, they're still, they still can be natural. It depends on how you feed them, but they're not a heritage breed per se. Now, these are birds that have been selectively bred for meat production, which makes them have a lot of meat on them way more than the ranger birds. But what people disagree on is some people are really upset by the fact that the Cornish cross birds, they're, they're just, they're just like little piggies.

Speaker 1 ([06:14](#)):

They are bred to eat, they're obsessed with food and they will sit and eat themselves silly if you let them. And they don't have the same instincts to go run around the yard and peck at bugs. And like if we leave the door of the chicken coop open, they don't even try to go out cause they're like, eh, I'm just going to belly up to the feeder and call it good. And so some people are really put off by that. Now when we started this, I told myself that I wanted to do the ranger birds because I like heirloom things and it made more sense that they act a little bit more like you would expect a chicken to act and all of, you know, I had all these reasons. And so our first year we bought some of each, some red Rangers, some Cornish cross, and we raised them side by side.

Speaker 1 ([07:05](#)):

And the, again this is a personal preference thing for us, the Cornish cross bird's, it was like you couldn't, there was like no contest. They grew faster, they had way more meat on them. I've had people say, Oh, Cornish cross birds, the meat doesn't taste as good or it's more bland. I really didn't notice a difference, but what I did notice was the difference in the feed bill and when you're feeding meat chickens, it is not cheap, unless you have some magical source of organic homegrown grain, which we do not have here. Like I have pulled my hair out trying to find good organic chicken food locally in Wyoming for us and it just doesn't exist like I would like it to, so when I'm buying feed for them, I don't like adding in three or four extra weeks is pricey even, especially when that longer growing period that you will see that is required for a ranger chicken still doesn't yield as much meat.

Speaker 1 ([08:07](#)):

So for us it's an economical issue. And so we choose, the Cornish cross birds, even though they're not as heirloomy, to me, just like the economics of it just makes more sense. And again, that's totally your call. If you are drawn to the Rangers, do the Rangers if you're drawn to the Cornish cross, do those. But that's

my spiel. That's my opinion on a topic which brings us to feeding the meat birds. I wish I had some magical hack for this and at some point I would like to develop a awesome DIY meat bird feed recipe. And we have one for laying hens I've used in the past, but I just haven' been able to come up with a properly balanced ration quite yet for a fast growing bird, like a meat bird. So we're just purchasing regular old non-medicated meat bird starter and grower from the feed store, which I realize that may be extremely disappointing to some of you because you were hoping I had a recipe and I don't, if I ever figure something else out, you will be the first to know.

Speaker 1 ([09:21](#)):

I've also had a bunch of people asking how much we fed our meat birds. And I wish I had a more exact answer. Basically, we give a big scoop in the morning and a big scoop in the evening, which is super helpful, I realize. The key with meat birds like the Cornish cross is you don't want to overfeed them. They will eat. Like I said, they will eat themselves silly. They will eat themselves till they cannot walk. So for us, we'd kind of watch how fast they went through their food. But you know, with 30 birds we'd fill up the feeder in the morning and they would, it would be gone and then they would have a while without feed in front of them. And that it just worked for us. I didn't grow too fast. You don't want them to grow too fast because then they can have leg problems.

Speaker 1 ([10:07](#)):

I've heard stories of them having heart attack issues if you let them grow too big, cause they're just not meant to grow super big. I haven't had that issue, but we also didn't just let them gorge themselves. We would offer them scraps. Sometimes they would eat the scraps. They just weren't into foraging around the run. You know, our chicken run as much as our laying hens were. They did a little bit, but they kinda just rather lay around. Like I said, they're, they're little piggies, they're very lazy. Now as far as, shelter, we basically just have a section of our chicken coop where we keep the meat birds where they could go out if they want, but most of the time they stay inside. We did learn kind of the hard way to not keep laying chicks and meat bird chicks together.

Speaker 1 ([10:59](#)):

I remember one point, it was still just makes me sick to think about, we had gotten laying chicks and meat chicks on the same day and I'm like, they're all super tiny. And I thought, well, we can just put them in the same brooder for a while, you know, a couple weeks until they start growing a little bit bigger and then we'll separate them out. And that was a huge mistake. The first night we had the meat birds like trample several of the laying chicks. They're just way pushier and they're way more greedy with the food. And the little laying chicks were a little more timid and they were no contest. So since that day, the hard, hard lesson we learned do not keep the two varieties together. They're just laying chicks are no match for the bully of a meat chick. So, but otherwise we just keep them in the same place.

Speaker 1 ([11:49](#)):

They get in the brooder for a while with a heat lamp and then they get moved to a little section of our chicken coop. And it's nothing super complicated. The biggest difference between layers and meat chickens I've noticed is that meat birds, like I said, aren't, is prone to do chickeny things. I don't think they're as intelligent. Maybe they are, they just don't want to do anything with their life and they just like food. I don't know. Maybe they just don't care. I haven't been able to figure it out. They don't seem as intelligent as a laying hen, I don't think. And they, they kind of are messy. They poop a lot. If they're

indoors the whole time their pen gets pretty nasty. So if we're raising them in the winter, we have to strip the pen a lot. Otherwise if we can raise them outside, that's preferable just cause they don't get as gross.

Speaker 1 ([12:39](#)):

Like they just kind of trash a pen way faster than a laying hen cause literally they just sit there and poop all day. I feel like I'm not doing a good job of selling you on meat chickens. So yeah, I guess it's a little more real talk. We're still doing it though. Even with these little caveats. Obviously we're still doing it so you can do it too. I might just not be the best cheerleader on this topic. Okay. When to butcher, people always are curious. How long are you going to keep these meat birds around? It's a pretty short timeframe. I would say around eight weeks of age, depending on how much you're feeding. Eight to 10 weeks is when you can butcher the Cornish cross meat birds. Slower growing heritage breeds are gonna take longer, sometimes twice as long, sometimes half again as long.

Speaker 1 ([13:31](#)):

It just kinda depends on which breed you're getting. I highly recommend that when you purchase your chicks, you check the calendar maybe before you purchase and mark when they will be at butchering age because that eight weeks goes way faster than you think it will and you don't want to let the chicks get too far past that because then you'll end up potentially if you're going with the Cornish, some leg issues, some mobility issues, it just doesn't work. We have, I think we've, we've generally butchered in the nine to 10 week range. I think last time we did that, we ended up with birds who were five to six pounds after processing. We process them in bulk. It's a chicken butchering afternoon. Usually get it all done at once. We try to have a few friends come over and help. If you get the assembly line process going, it's really pretty simple.

Speaker 1 ([14:25](#)):

And we'll go into the butchering in somewhere else. Like I have a post on the blog. It's really hard to talk through it on a podcast. But there's some YouTube videos and there's some blog posts that we'll link in the show notes if you kind of want more of the visual step-by-step on the butchering process. But I will say that with all of the messiness aside of dealing with the messy chicks and dealing with the butchery home grown chicken is fantastic. And I love having homegrown chicken in the freezer. We wrap it in little shrink wrap bags. It stores very well. I like to roast them home, we use it to make broth, we use it to feed us throughout the week with different soups and casseroles. And it's just a simple, I really think roast chickens like our version of a quick supper if I don't have a lot of bandwidth or brain power to come up with something creative.

Speaker 1 ([15:23](#)):

Roast chicken is one of my go tos. And when I know that we raised it ourselves, it's even better. So all in all I think to wrap up, as you know, growing your own food isn't always easy and there's definitely some dirty, frustrating, difficult parts of it. And I think raising meat chickens definitely has some elements of that, but it just feels amazing to have a hand in growing the food that you eat. It feels good to be a producer instead of just a consumer. It feels good to set an intention and a goal, whether, you know, getting the chicks or planting a garden or getting the cap to raise for beef and seeing it through to the end. And I hope you give it a try if you haven't already. So if you decide to add meat birds into your homestead plan for the year, definitely shoot me a little note over on Facebook and Instagram and let me know how it's going.

New Speaker ([16:21](#)):

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