

#8 SAFE CARE AND HANDLING OF TURKEYS



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Communication Services

Turkey Characteristics

In the wild, turkeys live in flocks where the birds instinctively establish a social hierarchy or “pecking order.” Female turkeys are called hens and males are called toms. Wild turkeys feed on green leaves, seeds, berries, and insects. They are also capable of flying at more than 50 miles per hour for short distances and roost in trees at night. Wild turkeys have longer legs and necks and typically weigh less than domesticated turkeys. Commercial turkeys are not able to fly and mainly fed a diet of corn and soybeans. Federal law prohibits growers to feed growth hormones to

commercial turkeys.

Safe Care and Handling of Turkeys

- Approach your turkey in a calm and deliberate manner. Quick movements may startle your bird and cause it injury as it flees from you.
- Large domesticated tom turkeys may weigh up to 40 pounds or more. Therefore, use safe lifting practices, such as bending at the knees and slowly lifting with your legs, when picking up a large tom turkey.
- To remove a turkey from a pen, cage, or coop, turn the bird so it exits the enclosure while facing the enclosure door. Likewise, return a turkey to its pen, cage, or coop so it enters the enclosure while facing the enclosure door.
- Be aware that turkey pens, cage, and coops often have sharp edges and enclosure doors can act as pinch points.
- Prior to picking a turkey up, position the bird parallel to your body. Bend at the knees and firmly grasp the turkey by the near leg and far wing. The far wing should be grasped at the point where it attaches to the bird’s body. Lift with your legs to pick the turkey up.
- If scratched or seriously pecked by a turkey, notify your group leader, parent, or guardian. Wash the wound with soap and water and cover with a clean bandage. Seek medical attention if the wound is large/deep or appears to be infected.
- To avoid slipping or falling, wear shoes with slip resistant soles and step carefully when feeding and watering your turkey(s) or while cleaning a turkey coop.
- When showing your turkey at a poultry event, wear appropriate clothing such as a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and closed-toed shoes. Always tuck your shirt in and tie your shoe laces.
- Be alert for vehicular traffic and follow safe pedestrian rules when attending poultry events.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after handling a turkey or any other animal.

Portions of this Clover Safe incorporate information modified from Bradley, F.A. and Ernst, R. A. 1998, 4-H Poultry Showmanship, University of California DANR Publication 4-H-2060, 16 pages. Additional safety information provided by Brent Cutler, UC Davis Environmental Health & Safety.