

# How a Poultry Show Works in North America



(Here you can see row after row of chickens waiting to be judged)

## How It's All Laid Out:

Poultry shows are generally open to three types of fowl recognized by the American Poultry Association (APA) and the American Bantam Association (ABA). Each club has a book listing the breeds that are accepted by each association. The American Standard of Perfection published by the APA is one book and the Bantam Standard published by the ABA.

Turkeys and waterfowl are shown at most shows, but we will focus on chickens here, as they are by far the most common type of fowl at most shows.

It may appear at first glance that there are wall-to-wall chickens in no particular order. However, someone has worked hard to organize the birds. The pattern may not be apparent, but once you know what you are looking at, it will start to make sense.

## Large Fowl or Bantam?

The first thing you may notice is that there are very large birds and very small birds. You might even notice that some look almost identical except for the size. The large birds are known as large fowl or standard size. The small birds are bantams, sometimes called "banties".

A few types of birds come only in large fowl or bantam, but most can be either. The relationship is similar to "toy" or miniature dogs and their "normal" size counterparts. The goal is to have virtually the same bird, except for size. Typically large fowl will weigh in at 9 to 12 pounds while a bantam will weigh 2 to 3 pounds. Large fowl are the standard size for a chicken, but bantams are popular because they are smaller, easier to handle, take up less space, eat less food and still provide many of the benefits of owning chickens. In the show, large fowl and bantams will be shown separately.

**Classes:**

The next thing you may notice is that birds are broken down into classes.

For large fowl, the classes are named after the area of origin. You will notice an American Class, Asiatic Class, English Class, Mediterranean Class, Continental Class and an All Other Standard Breed Class.

For bantams, classes are named after physical characteristics. These include Game Bantams, Single Comb Clean Legged (S.C.C.L.), Rose Comb Clean Legged (R.C.C.L.), All Other Comb Clean Legged (A.O.C.C.L.), and Feather Legged Classes. Every breed will be listed in one and only one class.

**Breed:**

Within each class will be several breeds. Each breed will have specific characteristic(s) that differentiate it from all other breeds. One example of a breed is the Plymouth Rock. Breeds will differ in shape, feather characteristics, comb and other attributes.

Some breeds originated for meat production, some for egg production, others originated from Asian or European fighting cock stocks, while a few breeds were developed for ornamental qualities.

The Standard of Perfection and Bantam Standard will provide information on breeds, their characteristics and history.

**Variety:**

If you look at a breed you will find that there are often many color patterns represented, this color pattern is known by the term “variety”. Both large and bantam Plymouth Rocks are recognized in each Standard in Barred, White, Buff, Silver Penciled, Partridge, Columbian, and Blue varieties. The black variety was recently admitted, but for Plymouth Rock bantams only. Each of these varieties has distinctive traits that set it apart from other varieties. You may find some of the same varieties appearing in a number of breeds, for example, there are also Buff Cochins, Buff Cornish and Buff Orrington’s as well as a few other breeds.

The Standard of Perfection will list the characteristics of each variety in large fowl and bantams and the Bantam Standard will list each characteristic in bantams

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**Gender & Age:**

Within each variety, birds will be divided based on sex and age. A cock (C) is a male bird over one year old while a cockerel (K) is a male bird under one year old. A hen (H) is a female over one year old while a pullet (P) is a female under one year old. Birds might also be placed in a trio, which will be either an old trio (2 hens and a cock) or a young trio (2 pullets and a cockerel).

**Scoring Birds:**

Judges score birds using a detailed point system that compares various physical points on each bird. Certain characteristics are disqualifications and preclude a bird from being considered for placing. The closer a bird approaches the standard, the more points they

will score and the better their chances of placing. For more information on the point scale, see the Standard of Perfection published by the APA or the Bantam Standard published by the ABA. A copy should be available at the information desk at a show.

### **Placing:**

Judges will review the birds and place the best specimens.

The first step is to look at all of the pullets of one breed & variety and rank from first through third or fifth place. The same will be done with each age/gender group (cockerel's, hens, cocks) and the coop cards will be marked with a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc.

After all of the birds in a variety have been judged, the official will select the best out of the whole group and second best representative of the variety and mark them Best of Variety (BV) or Reserve of Variety (RV).

After all of the varieties of a breed have been judged for Best and Reserve, the official will pick from those birds the two that best represent the breed and will mark them Best of Breed (BB) and Reserve of Breed (RB).

After all of the breeds in a class have been judged, the official will place a Best and Reserve in the whole class from the Best and Reserve of Breeds these are then marked as Class Champion or Reserve Class Champion.

Typically a show will have a Champion Row where the best bird in each class is displayed. From the birds placed on Champion Row, the judges will select a Champion Large Fowl, and Champion Bantam. Finally a Grand Champion, or Best Bird of Show, may be selected from among the best of the waterfowl, turkeys and chickens.

### **Judges:**

The judges of a show are licensed either by the American Poultry Association or the American Bantam Association (or both). The licensing process requires years of practice, an apprenticeship, and passage of a strenuous written and practical test. Judges are poultry fanciers who have taken the hobby to its full extent and are a wealth of knowledge. It is considered good etiquette not to talk with or interfere with a judge while they are judging.

### **What if a bird is not in the Standard?**

There are many breeds, varieties or hybrids that are not recognized in the APA or ABA standards. (If they are not of a recognized breed, they may be placed but cannot win champion if they are entered into a show.) If the standard of perfection for the breed has not been officially determined, there are no standards by which a bird can be judged. To be admitted into the APA standard, a breed must have several supporters that have been working with it for at least 5 years and are able to have a minimum of 50 birds exhibited at a show. If all of these conditions are met, a breed or variety may be admitted to the standard and written up in the Standard of Perfection. It will be eligible to compete in shows from that point forward.