

Woman Creates New Chicken Breed

Sommer Prosser's drive to create a new breed of chickens began when she first saw a photo of Swedish Flower Hens, with mostly white heads and body spotting. She loved them but they're expensive to import from Sweden. So she started crossbreeding American breeds with the goal of creating beautiful birds that are also easy to care for and great egg layers.

She calls her birds Aloha chickens because of the colorful shirts worn in Hawaii.

"The idea was to take a practical farm chicken and dress it up in a colorful package. Alohas are supposed to be strong, tough, easy-care chickens – with color added on top," she says. "I floundered around trying mixes of Exchequer Leghorn, Speckled Sussex and New Hampshire Red, but I didn't have any real luck until I found a few small 'mystery chickens' of unknown origin in Phoenix. They were small in size, but had incredible spotting."

After seven years of breeding, she says her small Aloha hens breed true, and they are ideal in Arizona's heat where larger birds struggle to survive. But she knows most chicken folks like bigger birds, so she continues to breed to achieve spotting and size.

"Every time I introduce a stout, heavy breed into the mix, however, it takes about two years to bring the color back. Sometimes, Alohas want to return to their smaller size in a few generations, so outside blood is critical to keep size up," Prosser says.

Alohas may be any shade of brown, red or gold with white spotting on top. Prosser also likes bright yellow legs, upright, fan-shaped tails, and roosters with large upright combs.

Arizona chicken folks are happy with the size and like having a locally grown breed that is "feisty, clever, tough and pretty to look at." Prosser sold more than 1,000 chicks locally last year through Craigslist. Because temperatures are too hot to ship from Phoenix most of the year, her biggest



Aloha chickens are the result of crossbreeding between American breeds and Swedish Flower Hens.



Sommer Prosser of Phoenix, Arizona, created the new breed.

challenge is getting Alohas outside the state to interested breeders.

"If anyone is passing through Phoenix, driving fresh hatching eggs across country has been the absolute best way to get a new flock started, in a very cost effective way. You'd have about one week to get the eggs home and into an incubator to hatch," Prosser says, noting she could arrange to meet people with the eggs at local truck stops.

For more information about her breeding program, she suggests checking out her blog: alohachickens.blogspot.com. She also has a Pinterest page with Aloha photos.

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John Lubinski's "walnut harvest" system includes a walnut "putter" and collection bucket (left) and a drill-powered shucker that's used inside a 5-gal. pail to knock the shells off.

Homemade "Walnut Harvest" System

Using recycled materials, John Lubinski of Plainview, Minn., developed a walnut harvesting system that he says works fast and cost very little to build.

"I have only 5 walnut trees on my farm, but that's enough to make a lot of walnuts. I try to recycle everything I can and keep things simple."

His walnut shucking system includes an 8-in. wide, long-handled "putter". It's used to shove walnuts into a 10-in. wide, long-handled "dust pan" which lays flat on the ground. Nuts are dumped into a 5-gal. pail and a drill-powered shucker is then used



inside the pail to knock the shells off.

The shucked nuts are then dumped onto a 6-ft. long, 30-in. wide screen on top of three 55-gal. barrels. Lubinski rolls the nuts around by hand to knock off any remaining shell pieces, which fall through the screen's 1/2-in. openings and onto the ground. Any nuts with shells that can't be removed by hand go back into the pail for reshucking.

The walnut shucker works somewhat like a powered paint stirrer, and consists of a 25-in. length of 1/2-in. dia. metal rod inside 5/8-in. dia. conduit that serves as a guard. One end of the rod is fitted with a 3-piece stirring device



By mixing pumpkin and gourd seeds together and letting them cross-pollinate, Jerica Olson created these colorful "Frankenstein" gourds.

Frankenstein Gourds Sell Like Hotcakes

Jerica Olson created a Frankenstein gourd patch by mixing a bunch of pumpkin and gourd seeds together and letting them cross-pollinate. Customers bought up the bumpy, warty, colorful gourds by the armfuls.

"We put one packet of every variety we planted (44) into a bucket and shook all the seeds up," she explains. "Then we planted the seeds about 6 in. apart in four rows 15 ft. apart and waited to see what would happen."

The patch was inspired by her father's food plot where he grows orange pumpkins to feed wildlife. Olson's mother suggested they set up a highway produce stand to sell some and through the years the patch grew and became mostly Olson's project, helping to pay for college.

"We've always had kind of an eye for the weird stuff," Olson says. She first added blue pumpkins (Jarrahdale squash), then white pumpkins and warty gourds. The ever-changing and oddball gourds created a following of customers at the one event she attends (Goosefest in Middle River, Minn.) and at the Olsons' roadside self-serve stand.

This fall she added Porcelain Doll F1 Pink pumpkins contracted from the Pink Pumpkin Patch Foundation (www.pinkpumpkinpatch.org), which requires growers to donate a portion of sales to the foundation.

The pink pumpkins and the Frankenstein gourds were a hit, Olson says.

"The most fun was wandering through 3-ft. high leaves until we would find something," she says. "My favorite was a white gourd 3-ft. long, 10-in. diameter at the base, pear shaped and curved like a gooseneck with lime-green warts."

Olson priced the crossbred gourds the same as she does normal pumpkins and gourds, according to size – small gourds \$5/1, pumpkins \$4 and large gourds \$3.

The quarter-trailer load of weird gourds sold out the first day of the Goosefest.

Olson took photos and kept the most



She planted 44 different varieties, putting one packet of each variety into a bucket and then shaking all the seeds up before planting them.



The profits from her roadside stand helped Olson pay for college.

unusual gourds to save seeds for next year's patch. She's eager to see what the Frankenstein seeds will do in future years. Hopefully they will help pay off college loans and graduate art school tuition.

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made from 4 3/4-in. long, 1-in. wide, 1/8-in. thick sharpened metal blades that have 1-in. high, 1/8-in. thick metal "ears" welded onto their ends. The 3 blades are set at a 33-degree angle to each other, and as they rotate they cut through the shells.

"As I move the shucker up and down inside the pail, the blades slice off the walnut shells. It looks like boiling water bubbling up inside a heated pot," says Lubinski. "I can shuck a 5-gal. pail full of walnuts in less than a

minute."

Lubinski even makes use of the leftover shells. "I throw them into another pail and pour water on them. Then I run the resulting juice through a filter. It makes a great walnut stain for wood projects," he notes.

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