

The Araucana Chicken ¹

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The Breed

The Araucana is a unique breed that has been a topic of controversy ever since it was first imported into the United States sometime during the late 1920s or early 1930s. Not much is known about the origin of the Araucana except that some of them were transported to the United States from South America.

Araucana chickens were bred primarily for their novel characteristic of blue eggs. It is, however, a dual purpose bird that has a well-fleshed carcass. The hens are good layers of medium-sized eggs.

The blue shell color is a genetically dominant trait. This means that when the Araucana breed is crossed with another breed of domestic chicken the female offspring will always lay blue or tinted eggs. This has been the reason that some crossbreeds have been mistaken for purebred Araucanas.

It is not uncommon for another breed, the Ameraucana, to be mistaken for an Araucana. The Ameraucana was developed in the United States in the 1970s in an effort to retain blue egg color in a larger, tailed chicken.

Two distinguishing characteristics of the Araucana breed are that the chickens are rumpless (i.e., no tail -- that is, there is a complete absence of the tailhead) and have tufts of feathers which protrude from each side of the neck (see Figure 1). Ameraucana chickens, on the other hand, have a well-developed tail, a full beard, and muffs on each side of the face. Ameraucana chickens do not have the tufts of feathers protruding from each side of the neck (see Figure 1).

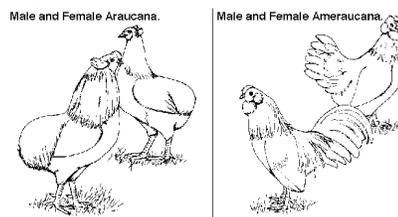


Figure 1.

Several distinguishing characteristics of the Araucana and Ameraucana breeds are compared in Table 1. Both breeds lay blue eggs. Therefore, just because a bird lays blue eggs does not mean it should automatically be classified as an Araucana.

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The Egg: The Cholesterol Myth

It has been claimed that Araucana eggs have less, or no cholesterol, when compared to eggs of other breeds. This attribute is especially appealing to those attempting to lower their total daily cholesterol intake. Dozens of Araucana eggs have been sold in health food stores for exorbitant prices promoting them as "health eggs." There is no scientific evidence to support this claim.

There have been numerous well-designed scientific studies that have compared the cholesterol and protein content of Araucana eggs to eggs from other breeds, especially the White Leghorn, a breed that dominates the commercial United States egg market. These comparisons have been made among breeds and the egg content comparisons corrected for egg size. The majority of the data collected in the most recent comparison studies have shown that Araucana eggs consistently contain **higher** concentrations of yolk cholesterol than White Leghorn eggs. Araucana eggs also consistently contained less total egg protein (albumen and yolk), calcium, zinc, and iron.

Definitions

Ear-tufts (tufts): A cluster of feathers protruding from each side of the neck. The feathers grow from a slender finger-like cartilaginous appendage located slightly below the ear.

Beard: A cluster of feathers hanging from the upper throat of some fowl. Found only in combination with muffs.

Muffs: A cluster of feathers projecting from the face below and around the sides of the eyes and extending from the beard to, and covering, the ear lobes.

Table 1.

Table 1. Araucana versus Ameraucana.		
Characteristic	Araucana	Ameraucana
Tail	no	yes
Ear-tufts	yes	no
Beard	no	yes
Muffs	no	yes
Blue eggs	yes	yes