



Pastured Poultry

Posted by [Jacob Moord](#)

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[Jacob Moord](#)

[Pastured Poultry](#)

July 24, 2020 06:12PM

Registered: 4 years ago

Posts: 5

I'm currently in the early stages of replanting an orchard. While the trees mature, I'm planning to make use of the orchard/pasture and raise broilers. Is anyone currently doing this? And if you are, what considerations have you had to make when you are spraying the trees? Are there any health concerns if the poultry are exposed to a holistic spray schedule?

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[Karen Brindle](#)

[Re: Pastured Poultry](#)

July 26, 2020 07:43AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 103

We have run chickens in one of our orchards a lot. I have used the holistic spray with no problems. However, chickens DIG. They concentrate their craters underneath the trees because that is where the shade and shelter is.

[Vista Ridge Orchard](#)

Zone 8a in Washington

235 Cider and heritage apple trees, 72 varieties,

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[Brittany Kordick](#)

[Re: Pastured Poultry](#)

July 29, 2020 02:03AM

Registered: 4 years ago

Posts: 211

When my mother planted her orchard, I was a fulltime vegetable and livestock farmer. It made us both feel quite warm and fuzzy when I asked her for permission to run my 200 laying hens in her young orchard. The trees were less than three years old at the time. It did not work well for us, to put it mildly. We use the standard metal tags wired onto the base of our grafted trees, and it only took one chicken pecking at something shiny to launch a feeding frenzy. We lost dozens of young trees to girdling. Happily, I made up my mind to lose the chickens, as well (I'm not a chicken person anyway).

I'm sure it's possible for chickens and orchards to coexist productively, but another problem I had was excess manure burning up the orchard floor and allowing every weed (we're in the South, so read pigweed amaranth and morning glory vines) we didn't want to get a toehold in my mother's previously gorgeous orchard floor. But -- we're talking 200 chickens confined in one tow-behind tractor. If I didn't move it as constantly as I should, I left a bare razed patch of nitrogen-rich ground in my wake. Smaller quantities in multiple houses might be just fine. But please learn from my mistakes!

I currently raise pastured rabbits in our orchard, and 1 to 9 rabbits (when does are raising a litter) per 4 by 6 foot pen are much more passive contributors to the orchard at large, though the holes and scrapes they leave in their wake during much of the year (tendency to dig when it's hot and when it's cold) can be prohibitive unless you're prepared to fill holes daily or break your ankle a lot. I'm looking forward to taking a break from animals in the orchard sometime soon. In fact, my former farm's motto went, "You can't shoot the weather, but you sure as !@#\$ can shoot the animals." I even did a cross-stitch of the saying, which still hangs defiantly on my foyer wall. But I truly do believe in the coexistence of animals and orchards, just also believe in going in with eyes wide open and being committed to a long learning curve.

RE: spraying, I don't worry about my rabbits in the least when doing a holistic mix based around neem oil. Lime sulfur and some of the other nastier ones, particularly copper with regard to sensitive livestock, I have plywood panels that lean against the pens so that the rabbits, as well as their pasture of the day is protected. But if you were spraying something like copper that might stick around on the pasture that you move onto the next day, you might need to do more.

Good luck!

[Kordick Family Farm](#)

Westfield, NC

Zone 7a

[Reply Quote](#)

[Jacob Moord](#)

Registered: 4 years ago

Posts: 5

[Re: Pastured Poultry](#)

August 01, 2020 12:16AM

Thanks for the feedback, Karen and Brittany. I'll be sure to make note of your experiences as I continue to plan. I'm relieved to hear that a holistic spray schedule won't be an issue as far as livestock health. Brittany, I appreciate the way you "shield" your rabbits and pasture-- nice tip!

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[James Smith](#)

[Re: Pastured Poultry](#)

January 09, 2021 07:04PM

Registered: 2 years ago

Posts: 57

New member here, so late to respond. I've raised chickens for years and suggest you utilise chicken tractors. First reason is that left to range freely they will eat things you don't want them to eat, roost and defecate where you don't want them to, and lay in 'rogue nests' where you can't find them. The second reason is for protection from predators, which includes domesticated dogs. The benefits are numerous. If left in a stationary pen they will quickly turn pasture into moonscape whereas a chicken tractor allows them to graze (without overgrazing) and fertilise (without overfertilizing) a section, then gets moved forward to fresh pasture. You reduce the risk of predation, and when spraying you can move them out of the spray area. I would suggest keeping them small, therefore easier to move and fit in your rows. Say for example, your tree rows are 20 feet apart. A ten foot wide tractor could work its way up one side of the row, then back down the other side. When the trees fill out, it would still function in the centre of the row. Rather than 100 chickens in a large tractor, I'd keep 10 chickens in 10 tractors. Smaller tractors would be easier to move, you could go longer between moves, and it spreads your resources across the orchard. If predation is not a huge issue, you could make them out of PVC pipe and chicken wire, they are so light you don't even need a power unit to move or rig up wheels to assist. As for labour, plan on a daily check of water, feed, collecting eggs, and moving tractor.

Washington Okanogan Valley

Zone 6b

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