

## Poultry Plant Profiles

In their natural environment, poultry are energetic foragers that select from a wide range of plants for optimum health. Below is a selection of some great "poultry plants" to consider for the pasture or backyard operation, either as forage or in the preparation of remedies.

by Alanna Moore

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*), which is also known as catmint, contains thymol and catnip oil, and can be used to repel lice. Its foliage also repels rodents and attracts cats.

A perennial member of the mint family, catnip tolerates frost and is grown from seed sown in spring, or from stem or root cuttings. The plant reaches 3.5 feet (100 cm.) in height and has small white flowers.

Catnip seems to live longer in cool climates with mild summers. Plant it in a sunny spot.

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is a low, sprawling, cold-tolerant herb that likes moisture and shade. A poultry favorite, chickweed has been used medicinally and as a human food for thousands of years. In Scandinavia, it is traditionally encouraged to grow in orchards as a good companion plant for trees.

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) is one of the best herbs to grow. It is a perennial herb which grows to 5 feet (1.5 m.). It has branching hairy stems and leaves, an extensive fleshy root system, and its flowers are generally mauve.

A nutritious tonic food, comfrey is the only known vegetable source of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Protein rich, comfrey also has medicinal properties. It's a cure for digestive disorders and, when pulverised in a blender, is used for poultices on wounds, sprains and broken bones. Allantoin is the active medicinal constituent.

Comfrey grows well where day and night are of equal length, so in tropical countries it will crop continuously

throughout the year. In colder climates it may die down over winter and resprout in spring. Yields of over 100 tons of green forage to the acre in warm areas have been recorded. The protein yield from comfrey is said to be 20 times that from soybean production.

Comfrey will grow rapidly with dressings of fresh poultry manure, and it becomes a good weed suppressor. It likes to grow in full sun in clean ground. After establishment (about a year) you can harvest the leaves daily. If the plant is not pruned regularly the stems grow too coarse and must be mulched. Comfrey



Catnip

can keep up good production for 12 years before dying off.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) was once highly valued in Europe as a protection against the plague. Garlic's medicinal actions are many. The regular addition (weekly or monthly) of finely chopped garlic to food or water is a good worm preventative. Garlic stimulates digestive organs, relieves catarrh, regularizes liver and gall bladder, treats intestinal infections and bacteria, and benefits blood circulation and heart action. It is also the supreme disinfectant.

Garlic needs a sunny position to grow but is happy in poor soils. Plant the individual cloves 8 inches (20 cm.) apart

and 2 inches (5 cm.) deep. Harvest seven months later when the tops die down, leave them to dry in the sun for two or three days, and store them in an airy, dry place. In cool climates you can plant them in spring and autumn, in hot climates only plant them in autumn.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*) is a native of tropical Asia, and its root is an appetizer and stimulant. It helps relieve stomach problems and, as a hot ginger drink, eases cold symptoms and promotes perspiration. It is classified as an adjuvant, which means that it is a good additive to other herbal preparations. In



Garlic

China, ginger sprouts are used for deworming people.

A piece of ginger root from the green-grocer's can be left to shoot and then planted in a sunny, frost-free position.

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*), also called lucerne, is a valuable source of green pick and protein, providing vitamins A, D, K and E, plus riboflavin, pantothenic and nicotinic acid. It is a tough perennial, lasting several years. Dried and chaffed alfalfa can be fed to birds.

Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) is much appreciated by poultry. Richly medicinal, strongly antiseptic, a vermifuge (de-wormer) and appetizer (especially the seeds), nasturtium is also good for

nervous ailments and depression, and it repels insect pests.

Nasturtium loves to grow in sandy soil in a sunny site and sprawls over fences and sheds. Clumping forms are also available. It is easy to grow from seed or cuttings. Preserve the seeds in vinegar and use them as a tonic and de-wormer.

Stinging nettles (*Urtica spp.*) have long been used throughout Europe as a wild vegetable and were sold in markets in the 18th century. All English country cottage gardens once contained a nettle patch. They were also highly valued for maintaining livestock health.

Nettles are excellent for poultry as they promote good health, help to increase egg production, and are very fattening. They are high in chlorophyll,

Oats (*Avena sativa*) can be made into a tonic drink — just boil it up as you would for barley water.

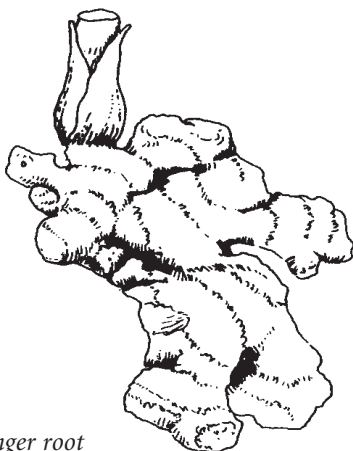
Sprouted oats provide many vitamins and minerals and are much more digestible than raw whole oats. To sprout oats, soak them in warm water for a few hours, then wet them briefly on a daily basis. If the sprouts are kept in a piece of shade cloth or onion bag it makes them easy to dip in water. When the sprouts develop, spread them out and let them soak up some sunshine.

Pigweed (*Portulacca oleracea*) is a small, succulent annual creeping herb. It is found worldwide. It has been part of the human diet for thousands of years, with leaves being eaten either raw or steamed. In Australia, the tiny seeds were once a

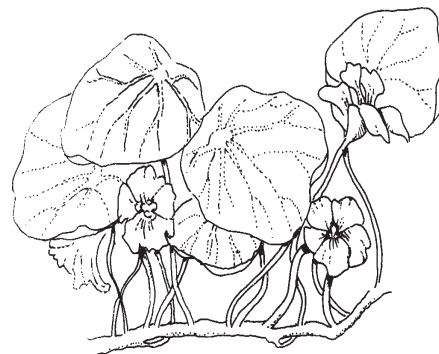
to its highly irritant leaves (full of rue oil) and develop skin rashes. Treat the plant with care and use gloves when picking its leaves. Propagate rue by seed or division.

Stinking Roger (*Tagetes minuta*) is usually regarded as a weed. A South American cousin of the marigold, it grows to 10 feet (3 m.) and smells strongly when brushed against. Its leaves are an irritant. Stinking Roger can be planted to deter flies, lice and mosquitoes. Fowl will eat the leaves. It can also be hung or strewn around as an insect repellent.

A good companion plant for tomatoes, the root exudates repel nematode and eelworm attacks on neighboring plants. An old storage trick used by farmers at corn harvest time was to place a layer of stinking Roger plants between every three or



Ginger root



Nasturtium



Wormwood

iron, phosphorus, potassium, manganese, calcium, sulfur, silica, protein and vitamins A, C and D. Nettles are also preventative against worms and contagion. A combination of powdered seaweed, comfrey and nettles is a powerful laying stimulant that, according to Juliette de Bairacli-Levy, can make even non-layers start to lay.

When cut and withered, nettles lose the formic acid that gives them their sting. Dry and powder them finely and add them to food. (This is good for humans, too!) You can also boil them for a few minutes to remove the sting and add them to cereal mash. Nettles boiled in whey are fed to combat worms in poultry.

staple food for Aboriginal people.

Rue (*Ruta graveolens*), also called the “herb of grace,” has both medicinal and insecticidal properties. Rue contains rutin, renowned for treating a host of diseases. Rue is used on the skin to remove parasites. It is a good wormer and is highly antiseptic. A border of rue is said to repel dogs, cats, wallabies and rabbits. Apply rue as a brew or a powder of dried leaves throughout feathers for lice. The herb is most potent when used fresh.

A small evergreen shrub, growing to one yard (1 m.) high, it is a hardy perennial that tolerates temperatures as low as -53 F (-12 C). It prefers slightly alkaline soil and full sun. Some people are allergic

four layers of corn cobs. This would repel weevils and even discourage rats.

Oddly enough, the “stink” of this plant, said to be “highly aromatic,” is due to essential oils which are commercially steam-distilled in France and the United States. More pleasant when diluted, this *Tagetes* oil is used in the perfume industry, as well as for flavoring confectionery and desserts.

Flowers and leaves (flowers are strongest) can be steeped in a pan of boiling water with the lid on and let stand until cold. The brew can be mixed 1:1 with pyrethrum solution to spray around the fowl house.

This annual plant can be established during any frost-free period. It grows easily from seed.

Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia albiflora*) is a fleshy, creeping herb which often makes a pest of itself, as it can become a rampant weed in gardens and even rainforests. Poultry can be used to control infestations. The blue-flowered native variety can be used as edible salad vegetable for people as well.

Wandering Jew loves to grow in shady, moist situations, such as on creekbanks, where it can be harvested and rationed out for appreciative poultry of all ages.

Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) is an extremely bitter herb, used internally for all worms and externally as an insecticide. An infusion of leaves is used as

a wash for lice, and leaves are placed in cupboards to eradicate moths in clothes.

Wormwood is also an antiseptic, a stimulant, a nervine and mental restorer, a stomachic, an appetizer and a liver tonic. However, if too much is used internally it has the opposite effect and is poisonous.

The intensely bitter, tonic and stimulant qualities make it popular as an ingredient in liqueurs such as absinthe, which is made from absinthol, extracted from wormwood. Roman wormwood is an ingredient of Vermouth, and it is also added to a special German wine that promotes appetite and digestion.

Wormwood can be planted in a sunny to shady situation. It is propagated by root division in spring or autumn, by cuttings, or with seeds sown in autumn,

soon after ripening. Plant 2 feet (60 cm.) apart and keep weed free.

Wormwood gets straggly and benefits from pruning (you can make a hedge of it). It is drought resistant. It is an unsuitable companion for vegetables and many other plants, which will not prosper if they are grown close by, because of its hostile root exudates.

Like southernwood, wormwood is an easy-to-grow, evergreen perennial, although it may lose its leaves in cold winter areas. It is a good herb to dry and strew on floors and is most powerful when leaves and flowers are picked just before opening. Fresh tops are used in weak brews.

For more poultry plant profiles and a complete permaculture-based management program, see Alanna Moore's *Backyard Poultry Naturally*, which is available from the Acres U.S.A. bookstore.

# Golf Balls vs. Egg-Thieving Snakes!

by Sarah M. Lewis

Did you know that golf balls make effective weapons against egg-thieving snakes? It's true. I learned about this cost-cutting practice from my co-worker Deborah Fowler after she casually mentioned she had to kill two chicken snakes. Luckily, she said, they couldn't get away when she spotted them because of the golf balls inside of them.

Golf balls? Did I hear her right? How is that possible? Snakes don't eat golf balls! In spite of my complete revulsion toward anything to do with snakes, my curiosity got the better of me, and Deborah obligingly filled me in about her battle against the legless egg rustlers.

These sneaky reptiles were robbing Deborah of extra income. I knew Deborah brought eggs to work and sold them, but now I learned that they were organic from free-range chickens. She said, "I came home a few days ago, went to gather the eggs, found there were no eggs in my hen's nests, and the golf balls I had put in the nests were missing."

I asked, "How did you know snakes had been in the nests?"

"Because the hay and the cedar shavings I use to keep lice off my hens was ruffled up. I killed two of the chicken snakes yesterday. I was working behind the chicken house and lifted up a piece of tin and there they were, 5 feet long

and as big around as my arm. I caught them one at a time behind the head with the hoe. They just couldn't move because of the golf balls in them. I could clearly see the outlines of the balls in their middles."

I almost felt sorry for the snakes: "Won't that kill them?"

"Eventually, they can't digest the balls or pass them. Anyway, I had seven golf balls, but those two snakes only had three balls each, and another golf ball went missing out of a nest yesterday. That means I've got another snake to catch."

Deborah informed me that feed stores sell artificial eggs which look real — I called up two feed stores, the Huntsville Feed & Farm and the New Waverly Feed & Farm Supply, and both sell ceramic eggs, the former for \$1.15 and the latter for \$1.05 each — but golf balls are cheaper and work just as well.

So there you have it, another use for golf balls. It doesn't matter if they're practice or good balls, used or new. The snakes don't care. Put them in a chicken's nest and solve a snake problem!

*Note: While this method does work and can be highly cost-effective, some growers prefer a nonlethal approach to wild predators. We encourage readers to write in and share their own creative solutions to this and other predator problems.*