

Repeat this process, extending the amount of time outside, until your guineas are out the whole day.

If possible, start by having their free-range time in the afternoon so your guineas start to associate lowering light levels with going back into the coop.

Before long, your guineas will be returning to the coop on their own. There will probably be some slip-ups, however. They may range out and be away from home when it starts getting dark. Their instinct may be to hunker down under a shrub or in some tall grass. This may happen a time or two, so be ready with your herding sticks to go guide them home. When my guineas are first learning this process, I try to find where they are an hour or more before sunset, just in case they don't get back on their own.

Also, when they're teenagers, your guineas may go through a rebellion period, just as all teenagers seem to. They will decide that the roof is far more fun than the coop. This will be the time you'll need to really reinforce the training, and be ready with herding sticks and even a ladder to make sure that all go in at night. If you let your guineas get away with staying out at this point, before long, part or all of your flock will be roosting outside at night.

The benefit to this program is that, if you should be unable to make it home before dark, you'll likely find all or nearly all your flock has put themselves up for the night, and all you'll have to do is close up the doors. Those who haven't gone inside are sitting nearby and can be herded in with herding sticks and a flashlight to help them see where they're going. Guineas can't see well at all at night.

Other factors that will help you in training your flock to go into the coop:

It's helpful for you to have a light (on a timer) inside a coop, which turns on an hour before sunset. Guineas hate going into a dark building. Their instinct tells them to go toward light, and it's more light at the top of a tree or rooftop than on the ground, so they'll fly up to roost. A light inside the coop will help tremendously. A red light, instead of a white one, will help settle them (red light doesn't interfere with melatonin production, which is the sleep-hormone). If you don't have electricity in your coop, or can't run an extension cord, get one of those battery-powered tap-on closet lights and turn it on before sunset.

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Also, make your coop as easy to access as possible. Have more than one door, if you can. Have your doors at ground level, or make sure your ramp is big and easy for them. Having a small or high door or a skinny ramp just makes it harder to go inside, which makes it harder to train your guineas and gives them more opportunities to "miss" going in the door. Avoid high doors, as you want your guineas calm at herding time. Speaking of coop doors, it helps if you have more than one door, or if your door is very large. In every guinea flock, there will be one or two self-appointed door-bullies. They think their job is to stand inside the door and harass every guinea coming in. The birds lower in the pecking order, or the less self-confident birds, will soon become reluctant to go in at night and may start roosting outside in preference to going through the abuse. It is harder for the door bullies to "guard" the door if it's a big door, or if there is more than one door.

It is a good idea to put out treats in the coop area, when you first let them out in the morning and in the late afternoon. This gives the guineas something to look forward to and pleasant associations with the coop yard. In fact, putting treats out randomly throughout the day will keep your guineas coming home to check for goodies. It also makes you the "Food Goddess" (or "Food God"). It's always a good thing to have your flock respond positively to your presence. (addition here- I call my guineas when I take millet- and they come running or flying... whatever gets them there the fastest!)

I start this gradual-release training when my keets are 4-5 weeks old, but I live in an area with long stretches of warm, dry weather, almost no daytime predators, lots of ground cover - and I'm fortunate enough to work at home, so I can keep an eye. You may want to wait until your keets are closer to 6-8 weeks old. I recommend against keeping them cooped up for 10 or 12 weeks or longer, just because guineas are very athletic birds and they need exercise. Also, I find training youngsters much easier than training older birds. Keets are less likely to run or fly from you at the first herding try than older guineas are.

There are many items to make your poultry keeping easy- automatic waterers, automatic coop doors with light sensors, I even use a game feeder to feed my free range guineas so I only fill it on occasion. Check out supplies on line or your local farm store.



Tips for Guinea fowl

The magic item for getting guineas used to you is white millet. I put mine in a can and shake it- Start doing this with a certain "call" and feed them while penned. Keep it up when they are out any you will find they will come to you to get their treat- Repetition, a **DISTINCTIVE** call and the reward they love will get them to respond to you.



www.fowlplayguineas.com

Free e-book available!

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Guineas— free ranging or confined?

Once mature— guineas are generally fairly carefree. Their major problem is predators— from the dog to owls, hawks and fox, all love the guinea as a food source and some, for the chase!

Like any other poultry, guineas need a building that is secure from predators and extreme weather. They need a place to roost at night. IF YOU LET THEM ROOST IN TREES, they may (and will, eventually) fall to predators. I use a covered pen so that I can confine my guineas if we are to be gone all-day or overnight. Guineas can fly and an uncovered pen will not keep them in. Some people leave the pen uncovered and train their guineas to fly back into the pen in the evening and enter the poultry house through a small opening. Again this is a personal decision - yours and not the guineas.

The Right Food

At 6 weeks of age, switch to **turkey or game bird grower**. I keep them on medicated to minimize coccidiosis. **WHENEVER CHANGING OVER TO A DIFFERENT FEED, MIX HALF OLD FEED WITH HALF NEW FEED** for a bit. This will avoid digestion upsets and they will be more likely to accept the new feed.

Keets love insects and greens. I give mine cut up clover leaves and grass and introduce them to beetles, stinkbugs and small insects starting at about a week. Be sure the greens and bugs have not been exposed to insecticides, herbicides or fertilizer. Adults love this also, if you are keeping your guineas in a coop and greens are not available, you may consider buying a bale of leafy alfalfa. I do this over the winter and the girls gobble up the leaves and it provides diet variation and vitamins. Try various fruits also—the earlier the age, the better. Offer grit too— they need it and enjoy it like a treat particularly those kept in pens.

PLEASE be certain to worm your birds. Do a bit of research and get them on a wormer plan or you will end up losing some due to parasite overload.

Bedding

Many breeders keep their guineas on a raised wire grid to allow waste to drop through. Guineas love to dust themselves and scratch. What has worked for our confined birds is a bed of fine gravel, keeping the birds out of the mud.

For those that free range, we have a raised opening that they can fly up to a landing board and then freely go inside the pen to eat and drink without predator

harassment. However, getting them used to this means penning them for a time (you will have to cover the pen— mesh works) and then allowing them to fly OUT onto the board. Placing white millet on the board encourages them and provides them a treat. If you are around your guineas enough, they will look to you for treats and come running when you call them. Also, you can raise the guineas in a coop (with or without chickens) with a fenced in area without a top, and put a landing board on the fence edge. With training, they will learn to fly up and out, range, and come back to the coop at night— of course— keep up those treats and food in the yard!

The Right Water Source

Make sure adequate clean water is available for your confined and ranging birds. I use the same vitamin mineral supplement in the water during the laying season for the breeder birds as what I use for the keets. Be sure to clean with a good detergent and even a weak bleach solution from time to time.

Yes you CAN train guineas

You may want your guineas to return to their designated roosting area every evening. This is not hard to accomplish, but does take some effort on your part in the beginning. The reward will be safe and healthy guineas that provide you with excellent tick and insect control and a lot of entertainment.

Keep your keets in a brooder box for the first six weeks --this may mean changing the box for a larger box as needed. If you handle them as much as possible they get used to it. If you can't handle them nor have no desire to, they will be quite fine. Just don't expect them to be as tame as chickens. I keep keets in my laundry room for the first two weeks so I can handle them. Then I move them to the poultry house in a cage-- again with a heat source if needed. There they spend 4 - 6 weeks more getting used to their permanent home. If you have other poultry, this will also get them used to each other.

After six weeks open the door in the late afternoon so they can venture outside. They will be leery at first and run back in when frightened. Eventually they will look forward to being out and will return in the evening and periodically during the day to eat the feed. As adults, most of their diet will consist of weed seeds and insects.

Once they reach this age of 6 - 8 weeks, they will be fairly self sufficient and only depend on you to give them fresh water daily and keep a feeder full for them.

Training your guineas - by Cindy Gibson

It is important to train your guineas, from an early age, to be herded and to go into the coop every night. Going into the coop is important for their protection: Guineas are just not equipped to be able to defend themselves against the kinds of nighttime predators that they will encounter in most parts of the world. Training your guineas to be herded will make your cooping easier; in addition, you'll be better able to get them in if you need to; for example, in case of a weather emergency. I've twice had to herd mine in, in the middle of the afternoon, because of oncoming very severe storms. I've herded them in from over ¼ mile away.

Some people train their guineas to return home by only letting them out of the coop a few at a time, which may work, but isn't really teaching them anything. Your guineas already know they want to stay close to their flock. What you want your guineas to learn is that at a certain time of day, or when you say so, it's time to go back to the coop.

The best way I've found to do that is to let them all out, but for just a little while the first day or two (maybe an hour). Let your guineas out in the late afternoon. Then, after they've been out awhile, use herding sticks (two long sticks that make it look like your arms are really long) and walk slowly behind your guineas, gently moving them to the coop. Any kind of long pole or stick works for herding. I use 6' bamboo plant-stakes found in the garden department of home improvement stores. At first, the keets are going to not respond to the herding sticks and you may have to actually push the keets with the sticks to keep them moving. After just a couple of days, though, they respond to the presence of the sticks.

Guineas and other ground-grazing birds have a built-in instinct to respond to "pressure" from the rear. This instinct ensures that, as they're grazing, the birds at the back of the flock will get some food. Otherwise, those at the front would linger until all the food was gone, and those at the back wouldn't get much. This same process is at work in flocks of geese and other birds.

See my other fliers for tips on keets Also, there is a FREE ebook at www.fowlplayguineas.com