



Above: Feather damage sustained from mating. *Right:* Hens wearing their aprons.



Saddle up your chickens!

Wrangling a new chicken apron design

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Let's face it, information about "manufactured" food would scare anyone. With children in mind, we knew we needed to take certain measures to keep our family healthy and rely less on the food production standards set by "Big Ag." Like many others, homesteading became the only real option for us. After acquiring a small piece of land in the foothills of the Rockies we were quickly on our way. What does every farm or homestead need or seem to have? Chickens. That was the one thing my husband and I knew we wanted, and, within a year, we converted the existing run-down greenhouse into a chicken coop.

Over the years, our coop grew to having almost 100 chickens. As many chicken owners know, chickens not only provide beautiful, fresh eggs, but also loads of entertainment. However, you will quickly notice how nasty they are to one another. They will strip feathers away and even cannibalize each other. Once the back end is exposed and bleeds, a chicken can relentlessly be attacked, leading to its demise.

Even before we introduced standard-sized roosters, the hens at the wrong end of the pecking order

would get pecked raw.

Enter the rooster

While it is not necessary to have a rooster in your flock to get eggs, having a rooster has its advantages. First, he will of course, fertilize the eggs, naturally helping the coop stay young with new chicks. He will also guard and protect his flock. A good rooster will keep an eye out for any danger. With one warning crow to the hens, they will run to safety. If need be, the rooster will often sacrifice himself. We have saved and lost some roosters to foxes, so we can attest to this fact.

The problem with having a rooster (other than he's not laying eggs), is that the same claws that are for fighting and defending, tear up the hens when he gets a little too "frisky" (mating).

At times, he may even scratch the flesh off their backs. If not isolated or treated in time, these hens would get infected, die and yes, get eaten by the flock. Not pretty.

The old solution

We knew that most chicken aprons/saddles would help with our chicken problem. What is a chicken apron or saddle? Basically, it is a device that you put on your chickens to protect them from roosters during mating. It also covers the raw/ex-

posed areas from other chickens, allowing the skin to heal. For the overly aggressive hen/rooster, it functions as a psychological deterrent. Meanwhile, it provides the over-pecked bird with both a little armor as well as something that distracts the more aggressive one. The right apron/saddle (with the right color), can also help you locate a free-range flock.

The down side

Where do I start? Well, there are various sites online, which offer free tutorials on how to sew your own saddles. However, I frankly didn't have the time, nor the motivation to sew over 50 aprons for my flock. An alternative would be to buy them from someone else. But at the price of at least \$7-\$11 each, it was simply not cost effective for us to purchase these to protect a chicken that cost us about \$2.50 per chick (for an expensive one).

Traditional aprons are sewn with fabric that will tear under normal use and will freeze when wet. The elastic bands that keep it in place will stretch out and/or break. Regardless, it will fall off. In the mud. In a coop. Need I say more? Traditional aprons are temporary chicken clothes that may fall apart within a season. Good idea, less than stellar result.

Our solution

We were determined and came up with a cheaper, better apron. Made from vinyl, the design needs no sewing, strings, and little to no washing! I certainly did not want to have to wash these things. We also added fake eyes to help deter predators and offer an extra layer of protection for both hens and roosters. We designed them to be lightweight, weatherproof, easy to put on, and dirt cheap. They worked so well for us we thought that they might be useful to other homesteaders as well so, in 2012, we started selling our Chicken Armor hen saddles. Since then, we have sold over 11,000 saddles worldwide. We are proud to offer them at www.chickenarmor.com for as low as 75¢ each.

Happy homesteading! 🐔