



# AMBER WAVES



# SILKIES



White Bearded Silkie



Splash Bearded Silkie



Partridge Bearded Silkie



Buff Bearded Silkie



Blue Bearded Silkie



Black Bearded Silkie

**Breed:** Chinese Silkie Chicken

**Temperament:** docile, easy to handle

**Lifespan:** 9 years

**Maintenance:** low Ideal owner: great for kids, novices and fowl enthusiasts

**History:** Chinese Silkies are believed to have originated in Asia, although despite the name, it is unclear whether it was in China, Japan or India. Amongst his many other exploits, Marco Polo is believed to have introduced this bird to the western world sometime between 1254 and 1324.

Of all the ornamental chicken breeds, the Silkie Bantam is one of the most popular and beloved, and certainly one of the most entertaining to watch. They're the lap kitty of the chicken world, complete with hair-like plumage and an incredibly sweet temperament.

**Appearance:** It only takes one look at this chicken to see how it got its name. This soft, hairy-feathered fowl looks unlike most other poultry. The Silkie's feathers lack barbs which would otherwise hold the strands together, thus the individual strands sit free of each other.

Silkies differ from other fowls in that they have dark flesh and five toes.

**Temperament:** Silkies are one of the most compliant and docile animals ever born and despite their soft delicate appearance are reasonably robust. The birds can be tamed and are often regarded by their owners as a real pet. Combine this with their curious, delicate appearance and one can see why this bird is often an appealing choice for the novice or child.

**Health and Lifespan:** Silkies have an average lifespan of 8 to 9 years.

**Grooming and Maintenance:** Silkies don't require much extra care compared to other varieties of fowl. It is not uncommon for breeders to trim the 'undercarriage' of their broody hens as knotted feather strands can strangle chicks. Regular trimming of the nails is recommended; use strong scissors and file the nails smooth, as often as necessary.

Clean your silkie's coop at least once a month, using fresh pine shavings on the floor. Sprinkle diatomaceous earth everywhere, except around food and water, to control fleas, lice and mites.

**Feeding:** If you are purchasing a commercial feed I recommend a 24% grower that you often use for starting chicks compared to 16%. Besides commercial feed and access to green grass and insects that crawl and fly during good weather. They also have access to scratch grain and grit. Oyster shell should also always be available.

**Breeding and Cost:** Unlike some crossbred pullets, Silkies are not repeat layers and will stop laying through winter. Breeders say to expect an average of 90 to 120 eggs per year. Silkie hens are good moms and are often bred with other varieties of fowl due to their strong brooding instincts. A Silkie hen will comfortably raise 6 to 8 chicks. Silkies cost from around \$20 to \$120 per bird or more; it's best to buy them from a breeder. If just starting out, breeders recommend buying Silkies in pairs or in threes.

**Space and Exercise:** Allow 2 square feet per silkie. The Silkie's feather structure prevents the bird from being able to fly they usually prefer to camp in great piles on the ground with several roosters, hens and young birds all sleeping together. They can be housed on bare earth although shavings and deep litter is preferable to prevent damage to the feathers from rough, muddy conditions. Be mindful that predators such as dogs, cats and foxes would also find these birds easy targets.

**Recommended For:** Silkies make excellent backyard and pet fowl. They are reasonably quiet (though check with local council regulations governing the keeping of poultry in your area) and a couple of hens can be kept without the need for a rooster. While not prolific layers, 6 to 8 hens are adequate for a small family although the eggs are small, around 40 grams.

Silkies are an ideal bird to introduce the novice and child to poultry keeping and pet care. They are suitable for children aged from around 6 years and up

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