

Chicken Comb Color & Texture Health Scale

Diagnostic blood flow and clinical observation spectrum for backyard keepers

COMB VASCULARITY REFLECTS INTERNAL CIRCULATION & HORMONES

A hen's comb shrinks and pales naturally during molt or winter breaks. Context determines urgency.

1. Vibrant Red & Plump (Peak Health / Active Layer)

OPTIMAL VASCULARITY

APPEARANCE: Bright, deep crimson red, warm to the touch, glossy texture, standing upright.

CLINICAL CAUSE: Strong blood circulation and high estrogen production. Hen is in peak laying condition.

KEEPER PROTOCOLStandard layer ration (16% protein, 3.5-4% calcium) and clean water access.

2. Pale Pink / Shrunken (Normal Laying Pause / Molt)

PHYSIOLOGICAL REST

APPEARANCE: Dull pink, dry, noticeably shrunken in size, cooler skin surface temperature.

CLINICAL CAUSE: Hormonal shutdown during annual fall molt, broodiness, winter rest, or pullet pre-lay.

KEEPER PROTOCOLNormal if bird is active and eating. Boost feather recovery with 18-20% grower feed.

3. Ashen White / Flaky (Severe Anemia / Infestation)

ANEMIC CRISIS

APPEARANCE: Chalky white, shriveled, covered in white flakes or crust, cold to the touch.

CLINICAL CAUSE: Critical red blood cell loss from Northern Fowl Mites, heavy lice, internal bleeding, or worms.

KEEPER PROTOCOLPerform immediate vent & feather-shaft check for parasites. Dose poultry vitamins + iron.

4. Dark Purple / Blue / Black Tips (Critical Hypoxia)

CIRCULATORY COLLAPSE

APPEARANCE: Dusky cyanotic purple comb tips, blue-tinted wattles, or dry blackened margins.

CLINICAL CAUSE: Severe lack of oxygen: acute respiratory distress, congestive heart failure, or frostbite necrosis.

KEEPER PROTOCOLEmergency veterinary case. Provide immediate supplemental oxygen/warmth if prescribed.

CRITICAL COMB EMERGENCY TRIGGERS

- Comb turns purple or blue accompanied by open-mouth panting (acute heart/respiratory failure)
- Comb is papery white and bird is too weak to walk or perch (severe parasitic anemia)
- Black raised scabs and pustules covering comb, face, and eyelids (Avian Fowl Pox virus)
- Comb is frozen hard, white or translucent, in sub-zero winter temperatures (active frostbite)