



# Poultry Saddles

## The story behind the Hen Saver® hen apron



**This Hen Saver® hen apron is single-strap with fixed shoulder protector. Hen Saver is a patent-pending triple-layer hen apron designed to protect hens' backs from roosters. This model includes a strong double-layer shoulder protector that is sewn onto the apron.**

**TOBI KOSANKE  
CRAZY K FARM  
TEXAS**

As many chicken owners can attest to, when roosters mate with hens, the hens often sustain feather loss and cuts and gashes on their

backs and shoulders that can lead to infection, picking, cannibalism and even death. Hen aprons are devices worn by hens to protect their backs from roosters during mating, and have been around, in one form or another, almost as long as the chicken has been domesticated. A good hen apron offers a level of protection for the hen against injury, while affording prompt healing and feather re-growth in chickens with existing wounds and feather loss. The level of protection afforded by a particular apron depends on the type of material, and a comfortable, proper fit.

Like many chicken owners, we used inexpensive aprons that we purchased from folks on the Internet, poultry-supplies sites, or at poultry shows and meets. Although these aprons offered our hens some measure of protection against our roosters, none offered protection for our hens' shoulders. It was very difficult to find aprons designed specifically to

fit our small bantams or large standard hens, and they did not stand up to the battering imposed on them by weather, frequent dust bathing, and the general frolicking and feeding activities of our active pastured chickens. After limited use, these aprons invariably bleached out and tore; the straps became unsecured, the seams came apart, or the fabric frayed. So we had to replace them...frequently. We were spending a small fortune buying hen aprons for many of our 100 chickens. Out of frustration with existing hen apron designs (and to save a significant amount of money), we began to experiment with a variety of constructions, fabrics and styles in order to create a hen apron that could endure the rough treatment by our chickens, their pastured environment and the brutal Texas weather.

After we lost several of our chickens to chicken hawks, including one of our "hawk smart" Ameraucanas, we studied the pattern and locations of the wounds created by the hawk's talons and further designed our hen apron to cover those areas with a triple-layer, highly puncture-resistant construction that tended to fold laterally to inhibit the ability of a hawk to gain secure purchase of the chicken. (Of course, we do not guarantee that our apron will protect chickens 100% from birds of prey—nothing can do that—but based on what we've seen on our farm, our apron does appear to make it more difficult for the hawks to securely grab a chicken.) After intensive hands-on research conducted by our girls in the field, we finally hit upon a high-quality hen apron that was a huge improvement over existing designs: a far more resilient and durable apron that provided a more custom and comfortable fit for our chickens, stood up to the most amorous of our roosters, offered potential protection from chicken hawks to both our hens and our roosters, and that protected our hens' shoulders as well as their backs. Our girls were saved! They went from looking ready for the pot to looking like they had never lost a feather.

Our triple-layer Hen Saver® hen apron contains unique features that provide increased functionality and durability over other aprons, including: a notch at the base to accommodate the chicken's tail feathers; two different strap styles—a single-strap style better suited for less-active, confined, cooped, pet, show and



This was one of our first hen aprons, when we were testing a variety of fabrics. This one was made from denim—the type of fabric one would use to make a pair of jeans. We found that typical denim fabric could not stand up to the weather or the nails and beaks of our amorous roosters. This is what all of our purchased aprons looked like after a few months of use.

This was an apron we made using a published apron design. The fabric we tested stood up very well to the abuse my chickens inflicted on it. The design, however, did not. Although we used a superior thread, the external stitching and seams frayed on both the back and edges of the apron. We also found that the double line of central stitching tended to cause the apron to fold tightly against the hen's sides after about a month of use, making it easy for a hawk to grasp the chicken.





After using the Hen Saver® aprons, the hens went from looking ready for the pot to looking like they had never lost a feather.



breeding chickens, and a two-strap style intended for more active free-ranging or pastured backyard and commercial chickens; finished-seam stitching that secures a layer of natural, breathable batting between two layers of highly rip-, tear- and puncture-resistant, tight-weave fabric for both extra protection against the rooster's beak and nails and to provide potential protection against hawks; and optional fixed or removable shoulder protector that provides protection without inhibiting the chicken's ability to dust bathe or fly. Based on use of our hen aprons by our chickens, one of our Hen Saver® hen aprons lasts as long as three or four of the other versions of hen aprons that we have tried.

We make five different sizes of apron to accommodate most shapes and sizes of hens and roosters.

After a few months of selling our aprons to friends and acquaintances, their positive reviews compelled us to open shop to the general public and make Hen

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Saver® available through our website at [www.crazykfarm.com](http://www.crazykfarm.com).

We recently expanded to include custom orders. Although these custom orders may require fabrics and colors that are not as resilient or protective as those of our standard fabrics, you can have a flock of chickens running around your yard wearing the colors and numbers of your favorite sports team in September and all costumed out as little ghosts and pumpkins in October!

Hen Saver® has been granted a provisional patent by the United States Patent Office. Although we've put a lot of time and effort into developing the best product possible for our chickens, we are aware that there is always room for improvement and we are constantly testing different materials and experimenting with a variety of design tweaks. If you decide to try our apron and have any helpful comments or suggestions about how Hen Saver® can be improved to make it the perfect hen apron for you and your chickens, please send them to us at [info@hensaver.com](mailto:info@hensaver.com).

*For more information, see the Hen Saver® ad on page 13 or visit [www.crazykfarm.com](http://www.crazykfarm.com).*

## Saddles & Treading for Hens

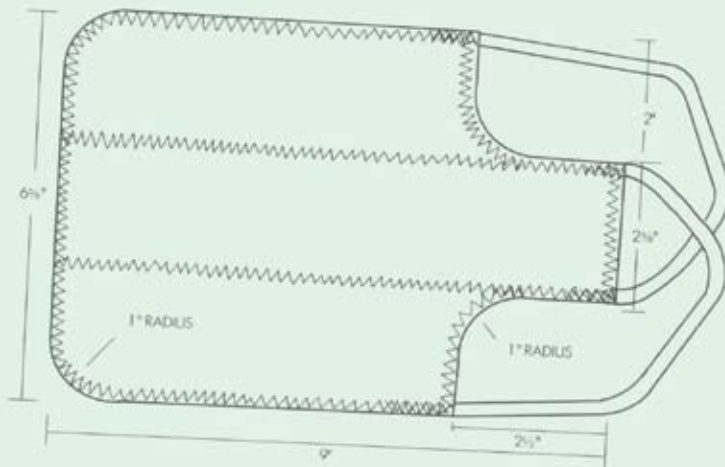
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A cock may pull out a hen's feathers while treading during mating. A hen with missing feathers on her back has little protection from the cock's claws during future mating, and as a result may be seriously wounded.

If a hen has her sides sliced up by a rooster's toenails, isolate the hen and treat the wounds until they heal.

To protect hens from particularly brutal roosters, house the cocks in a private coop and let each run with the hens for only a day or two per week. Be sure to keep the cock's toenails clipped.

A temporary solution is to dress each hen in an apron or saddle. You can buy saddles ready-made, or make a quick and inexpensive version from two pieces of canvas or old-fashioned stiff cotton denim stitched together and fitted with elastic straps.



To make a saddle proportioned for a Rhode Island Red hen, you will need two pieces of denim or canvas 6-3/8" x 9", two pieces of 1/4" elastic and thread.

Apply the saddle when the hen's feathers start disappearing, not after she is already wounded.

Make a preliminary pattern from the legs of old denim jeans and keep adjusting it until it fits properly.

If the saddle is too tight it will chafe, rub off breast feathers, injure the hen's wings, or strangle the hen. If it's too loose, it will flop to one side and be useless.

To dress a hen, put her head through the center opening between the two elastic straps, then put one wing through each of the other openings so a strap runs beneath each wing.

When first dressed, the hen will try to back away from the saddle (please refrain from wounding her dignity by laughing), but soon enough she'll get used to it.

To readily identify each saddled hen, put her leg band number on the saddle using paint, embroidery, machine stitching, or iron-on patches.

A saddle is not intended as a permanent fixture on a hen's back, but will get you through the period during which you wish to collect fertile eggs.