

Araucanas and their Awesome Eggs

by Randi Lynn Mrvos

It's early morning. A strange-looking chicken sits on a nest and lays an egg—a blue egg!

Each breed of chickens lays eggs of a specific color. Eggs may be white, light brown, dark brown, or speckled. But some chickens produce blue eggs. Blue eggs come from chickens that produce a coloring substance inside their bodies called *oocyanin*. These eggs are blue throughout the shell, inside and outside, and the color can't be rubbed off. But as hens grow older, their blue eggs may fade a bit.



Araucana chickens lay blue eggs. They are rumpless chickens, which means that they are missing a few tail feathers and several bones along their spines called *vertebrae*.

Araucana chickens also have ear tufts. Ear tufts are feathers that grow from small tabs of skin on each side of the neck. Tufts can be small or large. Small tufts are found near the chicken's ears. Large tufts tend to be lower on the neck. Tufts come in several shapes. They can be curved like a spoon; fan-like; spherically shaped, like a ball; rosette or petal-shaped; or circular, like a powder puff.

Because of these chickens' unique look, some people like to keep Araucanas as pets. Araucanas are calm creatures and adapt to free range or confinement.



Having ear tufts may be beautiful, but it can also be a deadly trait. It all has to do with genes. Genes are found inside each body cell. They determine the physical features of living things. When animals mate, they pass their genes to their offspring. With Araucana chickens, sometimes the combination of genes from the hen and the rooster will cause the chick in the shell to die. Scientists have found that when two tufted genes are inherited, the ears and mouth of the unborn chick may not form properly and the chick will not survive.

The Araucana is not the only chicken that lays blue eggs. Ameraucana chickens produce blue eggs, too. These birds were developed in the United States in the 1970s. Ameraucanas have a tail, but they don't have ear tufts. Instead, Ameraucanas sport muffs and a beard. Muffs and beards are clusters of fluff that grow on the cheeks and chins of the chickens.

Some people think that Araucana chickens originated in Chile in an area ruled by the Araucana Indians. The Indians crossed two breeds of chickens, the Collonocas and the Quetros. The Collonocas laid blue eggs and were rumpless. The Quetros had tufts, but were tailed and laid brown eggs. It is believed that the Araucana Indians crossed these two breeds because they thought tailless chickens would be harder to catch by predators.

Araucana breeders are passionate about their chickens and their awesome blue eggs. Members of the [Araucana Club of America](#) strive to promote the Araucana through breeding, exhibiting, and disseminating information. In 2006, Araucanas celebrated 30 years of recognition by the American Poultry Association.

About the Author: Randi Lynn Mrvos is a columnist for The Creativity Connection and an editor for an educational website. Her work has appeared in *Highlights for Children*, *Scholastic Books*, *WeeOnes*, *Learning Through History Magazine*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, among other publications. Randi lives in Kentucky with her husband, her twelve-year daughter, Abby, and Ollie, the cat. For more information about Araucanas, Randi suggests you read *Araucana: Rings on their Ears* by Cathy Brunson. She thanks Fritz Ludwig for sharing his expertise.

About the Photos: Photo of chicks and blue eggs courtesy of Anne Cushing at araucanasonline.com. Photo of white Araucana chicken courtesy of Fritz Ludwig.

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