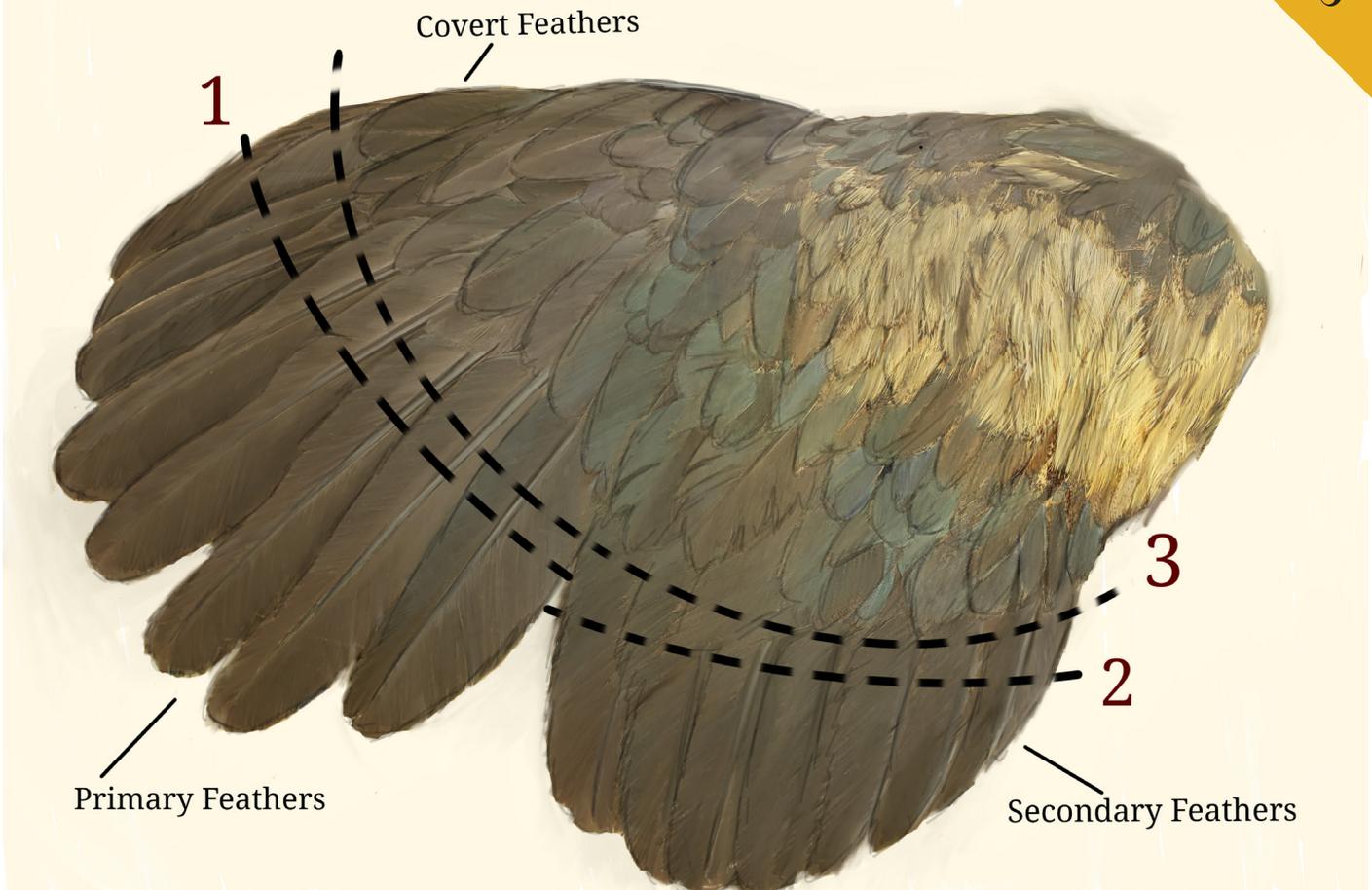


# CLIPPING CHICKEN WINGS

FLOCK FILES



Wing feathers may be trimmed to protect chickens from predators or keep them from getting run over on the road, to protect vegetable and flower beds, or to keep the birds from getting into the wrong breeding pen. Breeds that are best known as flyers include Leghorn, Hamburg, Old England Game, and nearly any bantam except Silkie.

Clipping chicken wings involves shortening the primary feathers — the first ten feathers at the end of one wing — to about half their length. Clipping these feathers causes a bird to lack the balance needed for flight. A bird that can still fly may need to have the same wing's secondary feathers clipped. If that still doesn't do the trick, more severe trimming is needed, but in

any case, cut the feathers no shorter than one inch from the wing, or about to the tips of the coverts.

If you have several chickens that need to be trimmed, decide whether you want to clip the right wing or the left wing, and clip the same wing on all the birds. That way you are less likely to inadvertently trim both wings on the same bird.

Clipping lasts only until new feathers grow during the next molt, which may be a few months in young birds or up to one year for older chickens. A chicken that persists in flying after a molt will need another wing trim.

Newly emerging feathers, whether on a young chicken or a recently molted older bird, should not be clipped until they are

fully formed and have hardened. Emerging feathers have blood vessels extending into the feather shafts to nourish their development. Clipping these blood feathers will cause excess bleeding. To identify blood feathers, spread the wing and inspect the underside for soft, pinkish, immature shafts. Once a feather is fully formed, however, the blood vessels recede and the feather shaft hardens and becomes hollow.

Another wing-trimming caveat is that some clipped feathers may not readily fall out during the next molt, requiring your assistance in removing them before new feathers can grow in. Clipping, therefore, should be considered a last resort after all other methods of confinement have failed.

*Originally written by Gail Damerow, Backyard Poultry April/May 2015*