

# A Try at Fermenting Feed



It seems so many new 'fad' feeding tactics have been taking over and coming into view every time I jump Online or talk to friends. Sprouting, fodder, and ferment-ing feed are a few that have caught my attention. Since I am in no way a gar-dener, I decided I would try my hand at fermenting feed. In a nutshell, fermented feed is any chicken food (preferably or-ganic all grain) that has been moistened, and allowed to ferment for a few days. As it ferments, it grows beneficial live cultures such as lactobacillus, acetobac-ter, and yeast. The 'good' bacteria begin to digest the food in the process, making it 'pre' digested for your chickens. Fer-mented feed is a healthy, natural probi-otic. I had been promised by many that it was easy to do, would save me money on my feed bill, my silkies would beg for it, and most importantly - it would be a genuine healthy alternative to the processed manufactured feed I have been buying all these years. Well, here is my story about my venture the into world of fermented feed. I studied and researched all the different ways of achieving the best fermented feed possible, and considered what type of feed to start off with.

I chose Organic Scratch and Peck Layer with 3% Calcium and 20% protein, as those numbers sounded great to me! The shipping cost me dearly as there were no drop points in Florida... but I pressed on. I also went to the Dollar Store and picked up a case of Mason Jars. Having a relatively small flock, I chose to go with the rotating method, in lieu of a slop bucket. I would have 5 jars fermenting at a time. In this method, 5 jars are filled with feed and filled with water about an inch above to avoid air from hitting the fermenting grains. Feed the oldest jar on day 5, refill that empty jar with feed and water, and keep that cycle going. I chose not to add any 'starters' to it, as I did not want to make the process any harder than it needed to be. I was also warned to be very cautious about closing the lids tight on the Mason Jars because as the feed ferments and gasses build up, the jar can ultimately shatter across my kitchen. GOOD TO KNOW! I filled 5 jars about halfway full of my wonderfully smelling organic feed, and mixed in water to cover the grains about 2 inches, gave it a good stir, then cautiously laid the tops crookedly on the jars. Excited about my new adventure, I hurried to bed to see what we would have in the morning. Upon waking, I had mushy feed and water across my kitchen counters and onto the floor.



Okay, lesson learned! The feed swells A LOT. I still had 4 days to get this right... right? Right! I got the portions figured out so no more overflow accidents, and stirred the mush about twice a day.

On day 5, super stoked, I filled a Tupperware bowl full of a sweet but sour smelling mash to take out to the ladies! Of course my video camera accompanied me so I could re-cord them devouring this wonderfully healthy food. Well... it did not quite go as planned. My girls just sniffed, perhaps they pecked, but eventually all 6 looked up at me with silkie brains full of question. I cheered them on in my baby voice, put some on my fingers and attempted to hand feed them all. Nope, still wasn't going to fly. I did not give up however, and attempted this for almost two weeks straight. I will say that one of my white pullets enjoyed the feed immensely and while that made me graciously happy and proud, I had to deal with her crest full of matted feathers stuck together with what my husband referred to as 'Chicken Beer Food'. I gave in. The fermented feed was not for me or my flock of fluff butts, but it was certainly a learning experience. I have heard wonderful stories of those who have gone this route and had huge suc-cess with it, but... 1.) I don't think they had silkies and 2.) I don't think they had *picky* silkies. We are back to the dry organic feed that they love so well and they are fine and healthy. It was certainly worth a shot! There is a wealth of information Online about fermenting feed and just because it did not work out for me and my flock, I would love to see it work for other silkie enthusiasts. I certainly had high hopes that we were on to something grand. Maybe you can give it a go and hopefully your outcome will fair much better than mine! As for me, I am going to take some gardening classes and go from there.

~ Gretchen Suggs :)

