

## Bonnie Poole



Bonnie Poole grew up in the rural central Massachusetts town of Warren with the make it-do-it-fix-it ethic of country life. She's a welder, a farmer, a gardener, a crafter, an engineer and a glass artist. Surely she is also a carpenter and construction worker, continuing to build a home in Colrain with her husband.

Three years ago I went out to interview Bonnie in her glass studio where she made jewelry utilizing the lamp work method. Lamp work utilizes rods of colored and other glass shaped and formed in the heat of a workbench mounted torch and allowed to cool in a small kiln. Compared to what is necessary to blow glass, it is a small investment and can be done at home. She was making beads and rings which she sold through the Shelburne coop.

Although she has an engineering degree, she doesn't anticipate returning to that type of career. Three years ago, she was planning to make welded steel garden sculptures as soon as her back yard barn workshop got built—something that her father-in-law was busy with while I was there this past week. There has been a change in circumstances due to the arrival of her first child, so Bonnie has put away her torch for now and moved a work bench up into a loft accessible only by climbing a ladder. There, she works with chicken feathers from her large flock of hens and roosters. These

benign materials are a better mix with her two year old daughter.



Bonnie has 80 chickens now and two pet pigs, plus her dogs. I followed her into the loft to see her feather jewelry while the toddler watched a video. “The chicken feathers are so beautiful, I just couldn’t see them going to waste,” explained Bonnie as I looked over three plastic tubs full of feathers up in her loft. “I just do the collecting when they molt...They are just so incredible, especially the rooster feathers.” Bonnie washes the feathers several times, rinses them, and soaks them in essential oils to kill the bacteria.

“Usually you cut part of the feather off, the fluffy part. They are pretty durable and it’s amazing how you can use a mild shampoo and wash them three times and rinse and lay them out on a towel and they will dry and you can just reseal the edges together. It’s a very impressive thing.”



Certain types of feathers she saves for mixed media fiber weavings rather than jewelry, but mostly she uses them to make feather earrings. This is what she has been selling at the coop. She isn't ready to put her fiber pieces in to the coop, and doesn't have time as a mother to make enough of the more complicated projects.

"I do want to hang some feathers from a beam, just for a cool, natural look in a corner or something, some feathers hanging down as decoration, they are fascinating," mused Bonnie, who always gives feathers to friends.

The chickens produce 15 dozen eggs a week, which Bonnie sells and which pays for their feed. Several hen houses sit in the yard with various configurations of low fences marking the territory around them. "The chicken is an interesting creature," commented Bonnie. "They won't jump a fence that they can't sit on top of." They won't jump the chicken wire even though it is low, but go to the gate because they can sit on the top and then go over. The chickens let her pick them up and we were able to pet them.

"We are kind of a magnet for birds. One of the roosters was just a stray that came through. That's why we call this Rogue Rooster Farm. One day he just ended up here, and he was a huge asset for predator warning, he makes all kinds of noises and the birds will come from wherever they are and go hide in the coop. The guineas were my father-in-laws, and they ended up here with the rest of them. And one day two peacocks came in my yard for a few days and stayed, a female pair.

Apparently a peacock will fly away if they are not really happy, and just go wild.”



When Bonnie began making jewelry, the Coop was the first place she thought to approach. “And it sells,” she added, “which is encouraging! There’s interest in it; it helps so much to know other people are interested in my work, and its not just in my head! There a great bunch of artists in there, there is so much *time* in that room. It’s amazing to think about , can you imagine the hours, the sweat and tears and everything in that shop?”