

Building A Chicken Coop

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Why Raise Chickens?



Of all the animals that people can raise as pets, chickens are unique in the sense that they produce something edible compared to other pets like dogs, horses, cats and fish. In fact, raising chickens for pets pay off in the long run as they are a source of fresh meat and eggs unlike what you normally buy in the supermarket.

And considering the craze about organic food, with your own backyard chickens it is very easy to produce your own organic eggs and poultry meat – all you have to do is feed your chickens organic chicken feed. Organically fed chicken that roam freely, eat grass are proven to lay eggs that have higher levels of Omega-3 fatty acids and Vitamin E while having lower cholesterol content!

Chickens Have Personalities Too

It may come as a surprise but each chicken has their own distinctive and endearing personality traits. Aside from this, chickens are very pleasing to look at because their plumages have an assortment of colors and patterns; they also come in all shapes and sizes. You will certainly be tempted to spoil them, pick them up and hug them to show them off to your friends and give them their individual names as you get familiarized with their characteristics.



Chicken Raising Contributes to Environmental Care

Chickens naturally love to range freely. By letting them range freely, you get two very tangible benefits in return – they would gladly eat any garden pest they encounter and help you with your grass cutting chores as they love to eat grass as well. As an added bonus, they'll turn all they have eaten in the form of organic fertilizer! All you have to do is sit down on the porch and watch them as they happily go about their daily routine.

Most people are not aware that chickens can eat almost anything people can, even leftover foods. Although you may reconsider feeding them onions and garlic as they would make their eggs taste funny.

Chickens are the best producers of black gold soil their waste is a naturally nitrogen-rich. Chickens also thrive on leaves, weeds and grass clippings – they actually help people get rid of their garden/farm refuse instead of simply getting rid of them.

Chickens are Low-Maintenance Pets

Of all animals that can be taken care of as pets, chickens are the ones that need almost no maintenance compared to others. All you have to do is make sure their food and water containers are freshly filled and replenished on a daily basis. And once they start laying eggs, then you have to gather the eggs daily as well. Cleaning their coops daily or every other day is good enough and their beddings have to be changed once every 3 or 4 weeks depending on weather conditions.

Is Chicken Raising Right for You?

Despite the advantages of raising backyard chicken, the practice is still somewhat uncommon. Most people are simply not aware that aside from the healthy eggs and poultry meat chickens can provide their family on a regular basis, chickens are fun pets too that you can cuddle.

Here are important considerations that have to be carefully evaluated and assessed if you are considering backyard chicken raising – for fun and pleasure and poultry meat and eggs.

Do You Have Time?

Although chickens are relatively low-maintenance, they do require time for daily care and maintenance. The necessary time is almost negligible as you only need 15 to 20 minutes daily (depending on the number of chickens in your flock) for replenishing their food and water and making sure that their beddings are dry.

Do You Have Space?

If chickens are cooped (housed) then you have to ensure that the run (where they are allowed to range freely during the day) is big enough and secure from predators. It is highly recommended that at least six square feet per bird is allotted in the outside run, the more space the better. Chickens are natural foragers and they eat insects, grass and weeds and any other that they can find in the run – the more they are able to forage, the healthier and more contented they will be. This is to your advantage since you will reap the benefits in tastier eggs and poultry meat.

Making chickens range freely is to your advantage because they love to scratch, dig holes for their dust baths and eat plants and weeds. The more space they have, the better it is for your yard since they can keep the grass trimmed. While they range freely, they also aerate the area with their scratching while their droppings fertilize the soil thus making it rich and fertile.

Are Chickens Allowed in Your Neighborhood?

An important aspect of chicken raising is to determine if it is allowed in your locality as not all towns do. Check your local regulations and ordinances regarding backyard chicken raising as it may be necessary for you to secure the necessary health or zoning permit since what you plan to do is not on a commercial level anyway. Do your homework in order to avoid unwelcome surprise visits from town hall officials.

In addition, you also have to find out about noise regulations especially if you plan to have roosters with your flock. It is better to check with your neighbors first in order to avoid misunderstandings and future complications regarding your new hobby. It might be a good idea also to mention that when the chickens start laying eggs, they would surely benefit from that too!

How Much Would It Cost?

The initial investment in constructing the chicken coop, feed supplies, cost of the birds, and maintenance

may reach a significant amount of money but in the long run, when they start laying fresh eggs and you already benefit from their poultry meat, the up front cost becomes negligible. This does not include yet the fact that your flock provides you with more fertile garden soil and that they keep farm pests at bay and your grass trimmed!

How Many?

It is important to note that chickens are social birds and do not fare well on their own, you should therefore have a minimum of two for starters. If your family loves eggs then it is best to have two hens per family member; this should be enough to take care of your egg requirements as soon as your chickens start laying eggs.

What Size Chicken?

Another important factor for consideration is the size of chicken, Standard (normal-size), or Bantam, chickens that are a fraction of the size of Standards and are mainly raised for ornamental purposes. Although bantams lay edible eggs also, they do so on a less frequent schedule and their eggs are smaller in size.

There is no problem in having both sizes in your flock as Silkies, Belgian Bearded D'Uccles and Sebrights are available only as Bantams whereas there are other breeds which are available in both sizes. You can combine both sizes in your flock if you want both types.

Chicken Breeds for Cold Weather

If the weather in your area is the cold climate type where temperatures drop below freezing during part or all of the year, it is better to have Standards than Bantams. Standards are hardier and fare better than Bantams. Chicken combs and wattles are an important factor to consider since the smaller they are, the less they will be affected by frostbite.

Common Cold Weather Breed Chickens

Chanticleers	Plymouth Rocks
Langshans	Sussexes
Orpingtons	Wyandottes

Chicken Breeds for Hot Weather

However if your locality regularly experience climates of over 100 degrees, it is best to avoid the big-sized and feathery chickens. In hot weather, most Bantams do well with the exception of the feather-footed varieties, and the following Standard breeds are highly recommended for hot climates:

Common Hot Weather Breed Chickens

Blue Andalusians	Light Brown Leghorns
Golden Campines	White Leghorns

Egg Production

If you want the best possible egg production, limit your search to the laying breeds. Understand, however, that many people feel the best layers (like White Leghorns) have a tendency to be more inconsistent and nervous and to avoid human contact. Dual-purpose and ornamental breeds are usually more docile and friendly but this is an oversimplified generalization. How friendly your birds are is in large part dependent on how well they have accustomed themselves to human contact and their individual personalities.

Common Egg Producing Chicken Breeds

White Leghorns	Stars
Rhode Island Reds	

Common Dual-Purpose Chicken Breeds

Australorps	Plymouth Rocks
Marans	Wyandottes
Orpingtons	

Colorful Chicken Eggs

Not all chicken eggs are the ubiquitous brown and white eggs you normally see at the grocery store there are also blue, green, chocolate brown, and cream-colored chicken eggs. The following chicken breeds are noted for the various colors of eggs that they produce which you may want to consider.

Chicken Breeds and their Colorful Eggs

Araucanas	Blue Eggs
Ameraucanas	Green/Blue Eggs
Barnvelders, Welsummers	Deep Reddish-Brown Eggs
Cuckoo Marans	Chocolate Brown Eggs
Plymouth Rocks, Salmon Faverolles	Pinkish Brown Eggs
Polish, Sussexes	Cream-Colored Eggs
White Leghorns, Anconas, Minorcas, Andalusians, Campines	White Eggs
Rhode Island Reds, Australorps, New Hampshire Reds, Delawares, Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes	Brown Eggs

Chicks or Starter Pullets?

You have a choice of starting your flock with chicks or starter pullets (hens that have recently started laying eggs).

If you are really into chicken raising, you'll love starting your flock with baby chicks; however, doing so requires that you give your flock considerable attention until they are full-grown hens.

You can purchase your baby chicks from a farm supply store (mostly during spring time) but they may not carry special breeds they mostly have a limited selection from which you can choose.

Make sure that you purchase female chicks instead of a mix of male and female as you may end up with a lot of roosters instead of hens! Keep in mind that roosters are not a requirement for hens to lay eggs.

Chicken Breeds

There are actually hundreds of domesticated chicken breeds all over the world some of which have distinct physical and behavioral characteristics due to cross-breeding and geographical factors.

Normally, a breed's physical traits differentiate it from other chickens such as size, color of plumage, type of comb (style), color of skin color, number of toes, feathering, color of earlobes and eggs, and geographical origin. Furthermore, chicken breeds are categorized according to their principal use, whether for eggs, meat, or ornamental purposes; some are also categorized as dual-purpose.

All chickens lay eggs, have edible meat, and have a unique appearance common to their particular breed. However, distinct breeds are the result of selective breeding to emphasize certain traits. Any breed may technically be used for general agricultural purposes, and all breeds are shown to some degree. But each chicken breed is known for a primary use.



Chickens for Egg Production

Egg producing chickens are generally light-weight and hens have a balanced temperament.

Egg Producing Chicken Breeds

Ameraucana	Kraienkoppe
Ancona	Lakenvelder
Andalusian	Leghorn
Araucana	Marans
Asturian Painted Hen	Minorca
Barnevelder	Orloff
Campine	Penedesenca
Catalana	Sicilian Buttercup
Easter Egger	White-Faced Black Spanish
Fayoumi	Welsummer
Jærhone	

Chickens for Meat Production



People who raise chickens for the meat alone prefer dual purpose breeds for meat production purposes, the following breeds are commonly used.

Common Meat Producing Chicken Breeds

Bresse	Ixworth
Indian Game (or Cornish)	

Dual-Purpose Chickens

The chicken breeds usually seen in farms and backyards all over the world are chickens that produce both meat and eggs. Although some of these breeds are slightly better for either egg or meat production, they are normally called dual-purpose breeds.

Common Dual-Purpose Chicken Breeds

Australorp	Marsh Daisy
Brahma	Naked Neck
Braekel	New Hampshire
Buckeye	Norfolk Grey
California Gray	Orpington
Chanticleer	Plymouth Rock
Cubalaya	Poltava
Derbyshire Redcap	Rhode Island Red
Dominique	Rhode Island White
Dorking	Scots Dumpy
Faverolles	Scots Grey
Holland	Sussex
Iowa Blue	Winnebago
Java	Wyandotte
Jersey Giant	



Chickens for Game, Exhibition and Show

For more than 100 years, the breeding of chicken for competitive game, exhibition and has greatly influenced the development of chicken breeds. Some breeds have been cross-developed with other breeds in order to come up with game, exhibition and show birds.

Game, Exhibition and Show Breeds

American Game G	Japanese Bantam
Asil G	La Fleche U
Appenzeller U	Malay G
Barbu de Watermael	Modern Game
Bearded d'Anvers	Nankin
Bearded d'Uccle	Old English Game G
Belgian d'Everberg	Pekin
Blue Hen of Delaware G	Phoenix
Booted Bantam	Polish U
Cochin	Rosecomb
Crevecoeur U	Sebright
Croad Langshan U	Serama
Dutch Bantam	Shamo G
Frizzle	Silkie
Ga NoiG	Sultan

Hamburg U

Sumatra

Houdan U

Vorwerk U

Chicken Raising Information You Should Know About

In the course of flock breeding and management, it is necessary to catch and handle birds at various times. Proper catching and handling methods of chickens can avoid both injury and discomfort not only to the birds but the persons handling them as well.

How to Determine if the Chicken is a Layer

By learning how to tell which chickens are layers in your flock, you can segregate those that can be used as meat source and save unnecessary costs by removing non-layers and use them cooking.

The easiest method to visually tell if a chicken is a layer or not is by inspecting the space between the pubic bones. If a chicken is a good layer, there is normally a two-finger spread between the public bones; if the chicken is non-layer, the pubic bones are rigid and close together.

Additionally, most good layers have yellow skin which shows signs of bleaching of pigment; however, there may be cases of disease and abnormality in chickens wherein the skin color may exhibit faded pigment.

Identifying Poultry Breeds

The first and most important decision a producer or backyard chicken raiser must make is the selection of the type of breed best suited for his requirements. Having a basic knowledge of poultry breeds makes it easier to recognize and understanding the characteristics of chickens for easier flock management.

The most common resource for any purebred chicken is to see if it is listed in the Standard of Perfection book. It lists breeds and varieties recognized by the American Poultry Association although breeds of foreign origin may not be listed like the Cornish Rock which is a crossbreed between the Cornish and White Rock breeds.

The most common characteristics of chickens that help identify their breed distinction are size, shape, color, feather pattern, and comb type.

Caring for Your Baby Chicks

Baby chicks are just like puppies or kittens, they are simply cute, lovable and very adorable! The initial time spent in bringing up your chicks is time well spent in getting to know them better and will certainly provide you and your family with memorable fun time.

During the first 4 weeks, baby chicks require care and monitoring, which means you have to check on them about 5 times a day or have somebody monitor their daily progress.



Where to Put the Baby Chicks

Since they are still quite small, they are easy to handle! However, they grow very quickly and when they reach 3 or 4 weeks old, they would definitely need a lot of space and would start making a big mess and clutter. This means you have to make sure that their coop is ready within this period so that you can transfer them to their new home.

During the initial four week period of taking care of the baby chicks it is best to put them in the garage, workshop, basement or an area that is both predator-proof and draft-proof environment. If none of the above are available, you can put them in a spare bedroom making sure to cover the floor as baby chicks love to scratch too but the topmost considerations are wherever you put the baby chicks, the area should be predator and draft proof.

Baby chicks need protection from drafts but should have sufficient ventilation. You can put them in a big carton box with holes or a plastic storage bin with walls at least 12" high making sure that each baby chick has ample space (at least 2 square feet) to move around.

Heat Source

During the first week of their lives, baby chicks need an air temperature of 95 degrees, 90 degrees on the second week, 85 degrees on the third, going down by 5 degrees weekly until the time they are ready to be transferred outside to their coop. Heating can best be provided by using a 250-watt infrared heat lamp positioned in the middle of their living area and suspended at a height that depends on your target temperature.



The use of a red heat bulb provides a darker environment as compared to white light. This provides chicks with respite from the glare, makes them fall asleep faster as well as preventing them from pecking one another.

Closely monitor how the chicks behave – if they crowd directly under the heat source, it is an indication that they are cold. You should lower the heat lamp or add another one. On the other hand if they go to the edges of their living area that means they are avoiding the heat, you should raise the heat lamp higher. Remember, a happy and contented flock will explore all around the brooder every chance they get.

Absorbent Bedding



Make sure that the flooring of the baby chicks housing is covered with absorbent material since they are big poopers. It is recommended to cover the floor with 1" thick wood shavings (pine is recommended) instead of newspaper or carton. Some people use paper towels but this requires changing often because they get soggy within a day or two.

To keep their house from stinking, it is wise to replace their bedding once a week. You can throw it in a compost pile where it will decay naturally and turn into fertilized earth.

Waterers and Feeders

Your baby chicks will need water right away as soon as you've put them in their new home. Observe them carefully and make sure that they find where the waterer is. You can teach your baby chicks to drink from the waterer by gently dipping their beaks in the water.



It is not recommended to use just any water container for your baby chicks. For best results, health reasons and safety, it is best to use a chick waterer. Using an open container like a dish or bowl would just invite the chicks to wade in the water which can be a cause of drowning. They will certainly enjoy playing in it, making it dirty which means you need to change it constantly during the day.

Using a chick waterer is no guarantee that it would be kept clean, baby chicks will always find a way to play with the water from time to time which may require periodic replenishment and/or change of water in the course of the day.

Just like the waterer, resist the temptation to use a regular dish or bowl. Buy a baby chick feeder so that they can not play in it and kick the feed out of the feeder and all over their house. Never underestimate baby chicks, they will surely find a way to play with whatever is inside their house!

Roosting Poles

For one reason or another, chickens love to roost when they're resting. One way to prevent them from playing with their waterer and feeder is to provide roosting poles about 5 inches off the ground to prevent them from roosting on the waterer and the feeder.

Feed

The most common question of newbies is how much food they should give their birds. The answer: as much as they want! Give your chickens 24/7 access to all the food they can eat since they can regulate themselves unlike other pets.

Buying chicken feed is pretty straightforward. Feed suppliers manufacture special baby chicks feed complete with everything they need. If you have had your baby chicks vaccinated against Coccidiosis, they you have to give them un-medicated feed. If not, or if they have only been vaccinated for Marek's Disease, medicated feed is the surest way to keep them healthy during the first few months.

Depending on the formulation of the feeds, baby chicks can be on starter feed for about 4 weeks before moving on to a combination of starter/grower for the next 16 weeks. Read the manufacturer's recommendations on the feed bag to be on the safe side.

You can also give your baby chicks food scraps, worms, bugs including small amounts of vegetable and dairy. Do this only as a treat and not on a regular basis. They need all the nutrients they can get from the starter feed and giving them treats can jeopardize their health and nutritional balance.

Grit

Since chickens don't have teeth they need something else to help them grind the food they eat for easier digestion. They need tiny pebbles which they store in their crop to grind their food. You need to give your

baby chicks sand, parakeet or canary gravel which is available from your local pet store. You can either provide this in a different bowl or mix it with their feed.

Netting

If you use a 12" high carton or box to house your baby chicks in, make sure to cover it with netting to prevent young chicks from flying out of their box. One week old chicks can literally fly out of the coop if the box is only a foot high; you can either use a 24" high box or drape netting on top to prevent from flying out.

Important Health Notes

One of the important inspections you have to perform on your baby chicks when you get home from the supplier is to check each one for *pasting up*, a circumstance wherein their droppings cake up and block their vent opening which prevents them from passing any droppings. The dried poo is stuck to their outside, totally or partially covering or blocking their vent. This must be resolved immediately by means of applying a warm, wet paper towel to the area and clearing the blockage with a toothpick or plastic spatula. If the situation warrants, it may be necessary to dunk the chick's rear in warm water to loosen and soften up the gunk to remove it easily. You have to do this otherwise there is a possibility your baby chick will die. After treating the baby chick, dry her off with a hair dryer and return her to the box with the other members of the flock. In the first week, you have to inspect birds that presented this situation as it often recurs but eventually goes away.

Time Out

When the baby chicks reach 2 to 3 weeks old, it's time to allow them some time outside if it is sunny and the weather is warm (at least between 65 to 70 degrees).

When you put them out for their time in the sun, make sure they are secure and have access to water and shade. Never leave them unattended because they are very good at flying by this age. Your baby chicks would definitely enjoy their time outside as they love digging around in the grass. If they encounter any problems are unhappy about their situations, they'd surely let you know with their incessant chirping!

When your baby chicks are between 4 to 5 weeks of age, they should be about ready to outside to their chicken coop. This is the time frame you should allow yourself to build their chicken coop from the time you get your baby chicks otherwise you would have some pretty smelly boarders if you let them stay in their temporary housing beyond 5 weeks!

Adequate Chicken Coop Provisions

Providing your chickens with proper housing is absolutely necessary to keep your birds in good physical shape, contented and happy.

As a rule of thumb, for a chicken coop to be satisfactory for your birds, it must meet the following requirements:

- It must be predator-proof from all sides. Make sure that all openings are protected with the correct size of

wire mesh – 15mm square so that so that predators can not reach inside the coop!

- Make sure that the area surrounding the coop is protected with wire-mesh fencing with the base buried at least 30cm below ground level to prevent foxes and rats from burrowing into the area. Rats would especially be drawn into the area because of chicken droppings.
- Make sure the coop is well ventilated (but not directly in the flow of air) to prevent respiratory diseases. Although chickens can stand cold weather they can not withstand being in the direct path of the wind.
- Make sure the coop is easy to clean.
- You should provide roosting poles for your birds because that is where they sleep! Make sure that there is adequate spacing so they don't crowd out one another.
- Put 1 nest box for every 4 or 5 birds in a dark corner of the coop to encourage your chickens to lay eggs. Nest boxes should be a little bit off the floor but lower than the roosting pole inside.
- Make sure the coop is roomy enough for the birds to roam around when they are inside, at least 4 square feet per bird.
- There should be a waterer and feeder inside the chicken coop.
- For easy disposal of droppings, place a removable plastic tray under the roosting poles.

The last section of this e-Book has drawings and schematic diagrams of chicken coops you can build yourself that can house anywhere from 2 to 4 chickens but can be built larger to accommodate more birds if you desire.

The lists of materials are included but you can also use scrap lumber so as to keep your expenses to the minimum.

Getting Ready for Your New Hobby

Before your baby chicks even arrive home, you have to adequately prepare them for their life outside. Since you only have approximately 4 to 5 weeks to get ready, here is a list of things and supplies you need to buy as soon as you get them in preparation for their move to their chicken coop.

Items You Need to Purchase

Waterer and Feeder

The best type of waterer you can get are those that automatically refill so you do not have to worry about your chicks everyday when they have already moved to their coop. Make sure that the design is suitable in such a way that they can not poo in the drinking trough and that they can not overturn it. The same holds true for the feeder, make sure they can not overturn it as well.

Food

Chicken feed is the easiest to buy since they are regularly available at pet stores and farm supplies and are of the complete mix of vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates and fat baby chicks need. You have a choice of organic and conventional types and when you chickens start laying eggs there is also a layer feed available for them.

Scratch

Scratch, a mixture of corn, wheat, oats and rye, is considered a treat for chickens. You usually just throw scratch on the ground for them to peck at. However scratch should not be regular part of their diet as it does not contain all of the nutrients they need.

Grit

As we have said before, since chickens do not have teeth they need something else like sand or gravel which they store in their crop to help them digest their food. You can mix grit with their feed or put it in a special container for easy access.

Bedding

Bedding keeps you chickens happy and healthy. It provides a soft surface for chickens to walk on as well as absorb droppings and odor. The nest should also have beddings so that the eggs will not break when they land on the nest floor. The best recommended bedding is pine wood shavings and should be at least 1-inch thick.

Dust Baths

If you plan to let out your chicken from their coop then you don't need to prepare a dust bath for them. If they would remain in the coop all throughout then you need a box about 10 to 12 inches high filled with 6" thick of equal parts ashes, road dust, sand and loose earth. Chickens love to take dust baths because this is their way of preventing parasites like mites and lice from finding a home in their feathers and legs.

Caring for Grown Chickens

Caring for pet chickens is pretty easy! They have the same needs as most any other pet. In this section we'll fill you in on daily, monthly, semi-annual and annual chores, as well as other nuances of chicken husbandry.

Daily Chores

- Always keep the feeders filled and the waterers full.
- Make sure the waterer is clean. Chickens do not like to drink dirty water and dehydration can make them ill very swiftly or worse can be a cause of death! Monitor your birds regularly to make sure they are active, and healthy. If in doubt, call your vet.
- Collect eggs and store them in the refrigerator pointy side down.
- Every time you let your chickens out of the coop into the run, double check the door when you lock them in to be sure it is secure and that predators can't get in.
- TIP: Chicken eggs normally have slight traces of dirt or chicken feces on them. Do not scrub them clean! Outside the egg is a delicate membrane called the *bloom* that holds off bacteria and other foreign matters. Scrubbing will damage this membrane.

Monthly Chores

- Change the coop's and nest bedding once a month to maintain cleanliness and avoid the build up of ammonia. Ammonia buildup is dangerous as it can cause respiratory illness.

- Remove the chicken droppings. You can put it in a compost bin or use it as fertilizer for your plants.

Twice a Year Chores

You have to clean the chicken coops every six months from top to bottom!

- Remove all bedding and nest materials, feed and water containers. Hose down and scrub the coop from top to bottom using a mixture of 10 parts water mixed with 1 part bleach and 1 part dish soap.
- Perform the same cleaning process with the feed and water containers, make sure they are thoroughly cleaned and rinsed well before replenishing the feed and water supply.
- After scrubbing, rinse well and allow to dry before replacing the bedding and nest materials. This should take only about 2-½ hours at the most.

Foods You Shouldn't Feed Your Chickens

Although chickens can eat leftovers, there are some foods they should not eat such as:

- ✗ Citrus fruits and peel
- ✗ Bones
- ✗ Any large serving of meat, or meat that has gone bad
- ✗ Garlic and onion
- ✗ Avocados
- ✗ Raw potatoes
- ✗ Chocolate
- ✗ *Morning Glories* and *Daffodils* are poisonous to chickens; make sure to keep an eye on your flock if you have these plants in your yard.

Treats You Can Give Your Chickens

Like children and adults, chickens also need treats that will motivate them to live healthy and happy. But! Unlike children and adults, the treats for chickens are different and are more nutritious. Compared to human treats that mostly comprises of chocolates, candies, and other sweets, chicken treats are more on veggies and fruits.

Yogurt is a classic favorite of them birds. They are tasty and are very good to the intestines. This is also a good source of calcium that can contribute greatly to the structure and health of the eggshell. But the most favorite and is very popular among every living chicken is the worm! They will eat it so fast and not a single evidence of it will linger.

Chickens, even with puny brains, have in it the command to like or dislike a certain treat. Below are some of the things that in general, chickens will come running for. If the first one didn't work, scratch it off then proceed to the next. Bon appetite!

Apple. May come in raw type or in applesauce. The seeds contain a small amount of cyanide but it's so small that it can't affect the chicken's health.

Banana. One of the good treats. This is also high in potassium thus; it is good for muscle activities.

Live Crickets. You can choose to hunt it or otherwise buy it in a pet or bait store. This is also a nice treat to give them. You can watch them run around chasing the critters plus it is a good source of protein.

Mature Cucumbers. Give the mature ones because they love it when the seeds and flesh is soft enough to peck on.

Fruits. There are exceptions. But the best fruit treats are peaches, pears, cherries, etc. Some say that it is not wise to give fruits to egg laying hens but some would beg to differ.

Leftovers. When we say "leftovers", it must be something that came from a human's plate minutes after mealtime is over. It must be edible. Anything that came out of your fridge that is considered as moldy or spoiled is not advisable. Don't give anything salty.

Catching and Handling Poultry

Handing chickens is an art, and practice makes perfect! The secret is a combination of being gentle and firm by letting them be aware that no matter how much they wriggle or squirm, they would not be able to get away.

Always guide the chicken towards the exit of the cage by placing your dominant hand over its back to make it face the opening of the cage. When you are ready to take the chicken out of the cage, place your other hand under its body with your forefinger between the legs, and grasp one leg with your thumb. Maintain your dominant hand on the chicken to restrain it and slowly bring it out of the cage.

In this position, the bird can be examined for culling, checked for external parasites, or evaluated for the other purposes.

With the same hold, the bird can be comfortably carried resting on the arm against the holder's body or restrained by holding the bird against the body with the arm.

Winter Safety Measures

There is no need to heat chicken coops during winter as chickens adapt readily to cold weather. In fact, their body metabolism actually changes according to the seasons. However, there are some steps and precautions you should take during really cold winters to make you and your birds happy!

- ✓ Apply petroleum jelly or heavy moisturizer every 2 or 3 days to the combs and wattles of your birds to protect them from frostbite.
- ✓ Ensure that their water supply is not frozen! Chickens will surely die if they have no water for long periods of time. To prevent the water from freezing, bring it inside the house overnight and return it to the coop first thing in the morning. Check at least twice daily to see that your chicken's water supply has not frozen.

Summer Safety Measures

Extreme summer heat is very risky for your chickens.

- ✓ Ensure that your birds have access to fresh, clean water at all times.
- ✓ Provide your birds with adequate shade in their run.
- ✓ Ensure that there is as much ventilation as possible inside their coop.

What to Do if Your Chickens Get Sick

Most illnesses of chickens are curable if they're caught and treated in time! If you notice that one of your birds is sick immediate isolate her from the rest of the flock to prevent the sickness from spreading to other flock members. Give adequate water and food to the isolated bird so that she can have access to both on a 24/7 basis.

Then, you should immediately contact your veterinarian so that the proper diagnosis can be made and medication can be prescribed.

The following may be symptoms of illness:

- Abnormal stool, including blood, visible worms, diarrhea, droppings that are all white. Normal stool is **brown with a white cap**.
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Loss of energy or depression**
- **Mangy appearance**
- **Sneezing**
- **Stunted growth**
- **Visible mites**

NOTE: Fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides can cause illnesses and may contaminate chicken eggs which you definitely do not want. If you really want plants and flowers in your front yard, use organic fertilizers.

Things you should NOT worry about:

- ✓ The first time you chickens lay eggs, the first eggs will be small, shells will be weak and brittle and some may not even have shells. This is no cause for alarm and not a sign of sickness.
- ✓ You will notice that once a year, your chickens will lose and re-grow their feathers. This is perfectly normal and is called molting.
- ✓ A tiny speck of blood in an egg is normal and no cause for worry. However, if it becomes frequent, or there is a significant amount of blood, then it's time to get an appointment with the veterinarian.

Remember, disease prevention is the most important part of keeping your chickens healthy. It is highly impossible however to totally eliminate the chance of illness but the probability of nipping it in the bud is very high since you will be checking your birds on a daily basis.

Whenever you handle your flock, make use that you wash your hands thoroughly after contact and wear

gloves when dealing with chicken droppings. It may also be a good idea to wear rubber boots or shoes for the purpose of going inside the coop and the chicken run in order to eliminate the spread of fecal matter inside your residence.

Chicken Care – One Year and Beyond

Chickens undergo the most changes in their life during the first year.

As adorable little baby chicks covered with fluffy feather, they require continual care and monitoring in preparation for their transition to outdoors coop life.

From 3 to 6 weeks old, their fuzzy covering begins to shed as they slowly grow mature feathers making them look mangy and diseased-looking. You will also notice at this stage that their wattles and combs grow bigger and turn a deeper red. Young roosters will also start crowing.

When the young hens (pullets) reach 20 to 25 weeks of age, they will start laying eggs – initially their eggs will be small with shells that are weak (sometimes none at all). However, as they lay eggs more frequently, the eggs will become bigger and the shells harder.

Broodiness

Your hens may go *broody* at any time – this is when they tenaciously persist on sitting on eggs in order to hatch them. It doesn't really matter to them if the eggs are fertilized or not.

You should be aware that a broody hen gets grumpy when you try to collect the eggs from underneath her; you have to beware as she might even peck you! Another factor to consider is that since the eggs are not fertilized if you allow the hen to sit on them, the eggs will decompose at a faster rate.

You have to break your hen of this habit by collecting the eggs on a daily basis.

You can employ several tactics to break hens of the broodiness habit. The most common technique is to repeatedly remove the errant chicken from the nest and carry her around for 15 minutes or more, two times daily for two or three days.

For hardcore birds, you can place ice cubes or ice pack in the nest. However there may be instances when really extreme measures may be necessary like putting your hen in solitary confinement with of course ensuring that the hen has adequate supply of food and water.

Molting

Once a year, chickens shed and re-grow some of their feathers usually during summer time. During the molting phase, they look ugly and sick and will not lay eggs. This is no cause for alarm since their feathers will grow back and they will look better than ever.

Two Common Health Problems and Solutions

Mites

Mites are a common problem especially when raising and keeping poultry. There are several kinds of mites that can and will infest your birds not just one variety.

Mites can be brought in by wild birds, such as starlings, sparrows, crows, swallows, or can be picked up at poultry shows, sales, just about anyplace where there is contact with other avian life. They can also be carried in by rodents who enter the coops in search of food. In order to prevent illness and the destruction of your flock, early intervention is absolutely necessary.

Chicken Mites are the most common as they live on the skin of the birds, in the nest boxes, and in the bedding. They are nocturnal parasites and suck blood from the chicken while it sleeps. They are very small in size and yellowish gray in color but turn dark as they feed. Keeping the coop clean is the best way to effectively combat chicken mites instead of treating the birds.

Northern Fowl Mites live on the bird itself and feeds around the clock. They are very small, reddish brown in color and often cause discoloration of chicken feathers due to their eggs and waste. Controlling the Northern Fowl Mite requires that the bird be treated directly instead of just the surroundings.

Infestation of these mites results in weakening, loss of appetite, emaciation, lowered egg production, lethargy, and sometimes death.

Scaley Leg Mites manifest themselves on the scales of the legs and feet. You will notice a lifting of the scales and separation from the skin of the leg underneath. Chicken legs and feet may become swollen, tender and have a discharge under the scales.

Poultry Lice

Another big problem of poultry is the many different forms of lice. Regardless of locality and geographic location there will be variations of lice that are dominant in the area. Lice are small wingless insects, with chewing mouth parts. Unlike mites, lice do not suck blood but rather feed on dry skin scales and feathers. They cause irritation to the host bird with their movement and chewing action. Poultry lice infection generally results in weak birds, lower egg production levels and makes the birds more susceptible to illnesses.

Treatment

There are many off the shelf products that can be used for treatment of mites and poultry lice infectivity.

Sevin powder is proven to be very effective against both parasites and can be used on the coops and directly on the birds themselves. Retreatment is recommended in order to neutralize the eggs that will hatch and reinfest the chickens and their coops.

Orange Guard is a non-toxic and very effective organic treatment for chicken coops but can not be directly used on the chickens.

Eprinex is an example of a pour-on medication that can address both infestations.

Scaley leg mites can best be treated with direct contact. Apply petrolatum jelly, vegetable, mineral, or linseed oil on chicken legs every two days till until the scales are smooth again.

Prevention

Prevention is almost impossible however early detection is the next best way to control louse and mite infestations. You should always keep the chicken coops and bedding clean and fresh. Regularly scrub coop and nesting boxes with disinfectant, soap and water, and make sure to inspect your flock regularly to see if there are signs of any infestation in order to correct the problem before any harm is done.

Most Common Chicken Predators

Coyote

Coyotes are normally found in North America from Alaska to Mexico and as far as Panama and has adapted to the environmental changes brought about urbanization and human occupation in the rural areas.



They are most active at night but in places where their natural habitat is still undisturbed by human settlements and activities, they are also active during the day especially during cool weather. There are coyotes however that have already adapted to the presence of humans and they tend to be active even during day time.

Coyotes belong to the dog family, are medium sized and weigh between 22 to 25 pounds. They have large erect ears, slender muzzle and bushy tail with the male of the breed noticeably larger than the female. They are either brownish-tan with streaks of gray or darker with less brown. They have a distinctive voice which consists of howls, high-pitched yaps, and intermittent dog-like barks.

They prey on domestic fowl like chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. Simply shooting these predators won't stop them, you either have to trap them or better yet, make sure that the area surrounding your chicken coop is coyote-proof.

Fisher Cat

A member of the weasel family, the fisher cat is also known as the pekan cat or black cat. Fishers live in a band in the forest are only in the North American continent.

Adult males weigh from 7 to 12 pounds and may reach up to 40 inches long including their tail which can be from 12 to 15 inches long. Adult females are smaller, approximately weighs from 4 to 5.5 pounds. Male fisher cats look grizzled because of the tri-colored hairs along their neck and shoulders areas.

They have short legs, small ears, and a long well-furred tail. The color of their coat ranges from dark brown to nearly black. They have large feet with five sharp toes which they use for climbing trees and killing their prey.

They usually prey on medium sized mammals and poultry. The only way to combat a fisher cat attack is to make sure that your birds are safe in their coops at night.



Fox

Foxes are quick and highly skilled hunters, preying on mice, cottontail rabbits and poultry birds. Although primarily nocturnal, they are active and sometimes come out to hunt also during daylight hours.

The fox resembles a bushy-tailed, medium sized dog with their long tail as the most noticeable and identifying feature. They normally weight between 10 to 15 pounds and are 39 to 41 inches in length.

Foxes are the nemesis of chicken owners. They normally hunt 2 hours after sundown and 2 hours before sunup and carry off their prey a good distance away. They are notorious for raiding poultry farms especially during spring because they need to provide food for their growing litters.



Hawk

Hawks are carnivores with strong, hooked beaks; their feet have three toes pointed forward and one turned back; and their claws are long, curved and very sharp with an eyesight that is several times better than humans. They can see a mouse from a height of as high as one mile.

Adult hawks have dark brown colored feathers on the back and the top of their wings and usually weigh anywhere from 2 and 4 pounds with a wingspan that can reach as wide as 56 inches.

Hawks usually kill their preys with their claws and tear them to bite-size pieces with their strong and sharp beak.

Raccoon

One of the most common predators of poultry farms is the raccoon. They are can live close to humans and are very adaptable and intelligent.

A grown raccoon is about 32 inches long (including the tail) and weighs between 11 to 18 pounds although some weigh as much as 30 pounds; generally male raccoons are larger than the females of the species. The most distinctive features of the raccoon are the black-ringed tail and coloration of the face which bears a resemblance to a bandit's mask.



Raccoons attack their prey by biting the head or upper neck area. They are known to mutilate chickens by pulling heads or legs off. They are also known to prey on wild birds and water fowls.

Skunk

Skunks pose little or no threat to adult chickens, but they usually prey on the chicks and eggs. There are four types of skunks you should be on the look out for – the hooded skunk, the striped skunk, the spotted skunk, and the hog-nosed skunk with the spotted skunk acknowledged as more dangerous since they know how to climb. Skunks are nocturnal in nature but they stay away from farms that have geese, dogs or cats.



Adult skunks are about 24 inches long (including a 7 to 10 inch tail) and weigh anywhere from 3 to 12 pounds, depending on age, sex, physical condition and time of year. On the average, male skunks are larger and heavier than the female.

Skunks occasionally kill poultry and eat eggs but they do not climb fences to get at their prey.

Chicken Coop Construction Guidelines

Building Your Backyard Chicken Coop

Before you begin building a chicken coop, the very first thing to do is survey the area where you plan to put the chicken coop. Decide whether what you plan to build will be portable (movable), semi-permanent or fixed.

Regardless of the type of backyard chicken coop you will build for your chickens, you have to make sure that you provide them with the best available comfort, cleanliness and security since this is where your flock will sleep and lay their eggs.

This is where your chickens will eat and sleep. Your coop will also need to keep them safe from potential predators. It is possible to buy a pre-made chicken coop and that is a good option for you if you have the money and don't have the time to build one on your own.

Pre-Planning and Site Selection Basics

- 1. Choose the Right Plan and Design:** Based on the family discussion as to how many chickens you plan to have, you already have an idea as to how big the chicken coop should be and what type you would build.
- 2. Other Factors to Consider:** When you have decided on the right plan and design, you also have to consider the following factors in order to make the building phase a lot easier for you.
 - a.** Allocate 4 heads of chicken per feeder and waterer.
 - b.** Build the nest boxes at the same time you build the chicken coop to save time.
- 3. Position the Coop Strategically** In choosing the right place for semi-permanent or fixed chicken coop, make sure that the area will have the right amount of sunlight and is not directly in the direction of the wind with predator threats kept to a minimum.

Buying Construction Materials

You are now ready to buy your construction materials and supplies. To save on expenses, it is recommended that you shop for your chicken coop building supplies from second hand shops. You never know the kind of bargain you will be able to find in these shops.

Check the chicken coop plan you have chosen and copy the list of materials of the plan. If you will have less than 4 chickens in the coop, the size of the coop is sufficient but for future expansion purposes and to preclude building another coop after a year or two, it may be best to double (or triple) the original size of the chicken coop.

Make sure that all of the basics are taken care of before you buy a single piece of lumber.

If you took our advice to use used lumber in building your chicken coop, then one of the problems you'll face is getting them all in the same lengths – don't worry, you can always cut them to size but bear in mind that the shortest piece you should get should also be the dimensions of the smallest piece in the chicken coop plan that you have chosen to avoid unnecessary joints.

In choosing your lumber pieces, make sure that they are:

1. Choose wood that are bigger or longer than the actual dimensions specified (you need to sand them clean yet) which means they'll become a little bit smaller.
2. Choose lumber that you can cut in half to make two equal pieces of the same length.
3. Don't worry about the cracks in the wood, the age of the wood guarantees that they are dry and will not split.
4. Buy as much as you need that are available in the second hand shop, you'll discover what a bargain (not to mention fun) it is to build your backyard chicken coop.

Ready, Set, Go!

Now the real fun begins!

Don't forget your notes, chicken coop plan, measuring tape, sander, power saw, work bench, face mask and leather gloves. It pays to be safe whenever you work with tools – electric or not!

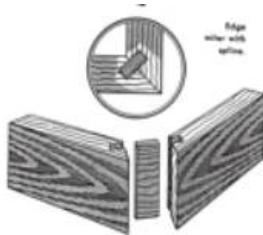
Once you have your plan and your materials you can start to build your backyard chicken coop. Follow your plan details and make sure that everything is secure.

It's not difficult to build a chicken coop although it may take a long time if you have not done any carpentry work in a long time but it is definitely exciting and fun, especially when the chicken coop begins to take shape!

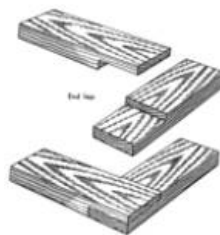
- Clean all the pieces of wood that you will use making doubly sure that there are no more nails on them.

- If necessary, sand them down with your electric sander so you will have a smooth surface for all the wood you will use.
- Cut them to size based on the dimensions provided on your chicken coop plan details.
- Join the bottom frames first, then the side frames and supporting frames.
- In assembling the frames, use wood glue to hold them in place where they are to be joined and drill very small pilot holes for the nails. Drilling pilot holes ensures that the nails go in straight.
- Better yet, use a miter joint or end lap joint as shown in the figures below. These are the two most common joints you need to use in building your chicken coop to ensure stability and sturdiness of your project.

Miter Joint



End Lap Joint



- When the frame is ready, you then have to put the sidings (plywood and/or chicken wire) and the roofing material of the chicken coop.
- When increasing the size or dimensions of your chicken coop, make sure that you double the length of the wood supports and the size.
- For example, from a 25mm x 25mm x 2m wood, increase it to 50mm x 50mm x 3m to ensure that the frame is strong and sturdy!
- The windows and doors should be the last ones you should work on.
- As soon as everything is finished, do a once-over inspection and plug all seams and joints with insulation material to prevent cold air from entering your flock's new house.
- Lastly, you can paint it any color you want to match the overall character of your home!

The Final Word

Free Range Chicken Raising

1. If you have enough space in your backyard, you may want to consider chicken raising free-range style.
2. To ensure that you do not spend too much, choose a corner area so that you already have two sides of the required 'walls' of the free-range site.
3. In putting in the fence posts, make sure that they are set at least 30cm into the ground.
4. Use only 25mm x 25mm x 2mm wire mesh – this gives you the necessary strength and protection against predators.
5. For the roof, you can either use corrugated plastic or tin sheeting.
6. Make sure that the fence reaches up to the roof and that the roof edges extend beyond the fence line.
7. The entrance door/gate should be wide enough so that you can truck in a wheel barrow – for bringing in

chicken feed, for cleaning purposes etcetera.

8. Make sure that you have enough perches for the chickens to rest and sleep on during the night.
9. Make provisions for at least 2 100-watt light bulb sockets in the middle of the free-range enclosure. Your chickens need warmth during the cold days. If at all possible, it may be better to also provide tarpaulin or plastic covering for the wall during cold seasons and when it rains.

Fencing /Overhead Cover Guidelines

1. Use the recommended size of 25mm x 25mm x 2mm wire mesh.
2. In putting up the fence, make sure it is set at least 30cm into the ground (wire mesh fence and post together) for added protection against predators.
3. To provide a bigger chicken run for the semi-permanent and permanent chicken coops, put/construct the whole structure in a big fenced in area following the fencing guidelines.
4. For overhead covers (except for free-range style chicken raising) of movable, semi-permanent and permanent chicken coops, it may be cheaper to use old fish nets.

Have fun and enjoy your new pets with the entire family!

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