



Chix in the City, Hens in the Hood

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Why keep chickens??

Chickens are fun!

Hens raised by hand become very friendly and have great personalities.

Raising hens gives you eggs!! You will never want to eat another store-bought egg!

Chickens are great recyclers!

Will eat tables scraps, and almost any leftovers.

Chickens love tender leaves, weeds, and grass clippings. They can provide weed control but will eat your dearly loved plants too.

Chickens make the best pets! They don't need to be walked twice a day.

Chickens love snails, earwigs, and any bug that crawls or moves.

Eliminate your pesticide and herbicide usage. You don't want to put snail bait out if your chickens are going to eat the snails. Same goes with weeds that chickens may eat.

Chicken provide good fertilizer for your garden.

Home grown vegetables are the BEST!

Raising chickens can reduce your carbon footprint. The eggs you eat come from your own flock, in your own yard. Your table scraps and leftovers no longer go to landfill.

Things to consider before purchasing chicks, chickens

Does your city allow hens and how many?

Each city is different.

Check your city ordinance before you plan your chicken coop and purchase chicks.

Do you have enough space?

Chickens need to about 10 square feet of yard and 3-4 square feet of enclosed coop.

Is your yard suitable? Where would you place the coop, can you provide sunlight and some shade?

Are you willing to let them out each day and close up the coop at night? This will determine how you design the coop and yard.

Is there a local vet that is knowable about birds, chickens?

How will your neighbors react?

How many chickens should you get?

Chickens are social animals- you should have a minimum of two and enough to provide eggs for a family.

What breed of chicken is best for you??

Larger birds tend to lay larger eggs.

Chickens have wonderful feathers, different looks. Can mix large and bantams.

White or brown eggs or??

Lots of fun to see different colors in the egg box.

Breed determines the color of egg. Look at color of ear lobe, or check a book, web site.

Standard size (large fowl) 5-10 lbs

Plymouth Rocks, Wyandotte's, Rhode Island Red, Jersey Giants, New Hampshires, Dominiques, Orptions, Sussex, Australorps, Orpingtons. White or Light Brown Leghorns

Small- Bantams, only 1-2 lbs

Australorps, Delawares, Frizzles, Leghorns, Minorcas, New Hampshires, Orpingtons, Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, Araucana, Cornish, Polish,

Chicken Breeds:

Breed: Australorp
Origin: British
Classification: heavy
Egg color: Brown

Breed: New Hampshire Red
Origin: American
Classification: heavy
Egg color: Brown

Breed: Plymouth Rock
Origin: American
Classification: heavy
Egg color: Brown

Breed: Rhode Island Red
Origin: American
Classification: heavy
Egg color: light brown to brown

Breed: Wyandotte
Origin: American
Classification: heavy
Egg color: Brown

Breed: Araucana
Origin: South America
Classification: light
Egg color: greens, blues, pink tints

Breed: Ameraucanas
Origin:
Classification:
Egg color: green/blue eggs

Breed: Leghorn, white (these are the type of chickens that lay for Safeway)
Origin: Mediterranean
Classification: light
Egg color: white

New chick care

Clear your schedule for the first 4 weeks. New chicks are like planting a garden from seeds- they need constant care and monitoring until they are large enough.

Make sure that you or a family member is available to check on the chicks at least 5 times a day.

A chick house is called a Brooder

Create a good start for healthy chickens.

Young chicks need to stay warm. Can be kept in a cardboard box or small cage. (I kept mine inside the house, in a cardboard box that was expanded as the chicks grew)

Should be draft-free and safe from predators.

Use pine shavings from a pet store, newspaper for the floor. Keep dry.

Don't use newspaper as it gets to slippery. ("splayed leg)

Provide about 1" thick pine shaving on the floor. (not cedar) Chicks will scratch as soon as they walk!

First week

Provide heat lamp for temperatures between 90 and 100 degrees. (95 degrees is ideal) Place so that chicks cannot touch the lamp. Can use a cloth cover to keep the heat in on one end.

Leave the lamp on 24 hours a day.

A 250 watt infrared heat lamp works best. Check out the chicks inside Cara's shop.

Decrease the temperature by about 5 degrees per week. (raise the lamp up)
At about 70 degrees, the chicks will no longer need a heat source.

Within 1 week chicks will start to grow wing feathers. As soon as they have a whole body of feathers, can eliminate the heat lamp but keep them warm. Keep an eye on if your chicks. If they crowd or huddle together under the lamp, they're too cold.

If they are at the edges, away from the lamp, it's too hot.

If it's just the right temperature, chicks will explore the whole floor and sleep anywhere.

Chicks grow quickly!

Give chicks adequate space- about 2 square feet per bird.

If keeping chicks in a box or container, you may have to raise the sides as chicks will jump.

You can provide small ½" diameter dowels for roosts. These little girls know exactly what to do with them. (no training needed)

Water and Feed

Provide chick starter mash in feed container. Keep clean and dry. The small holes keep birds from scratching the feed out and keeps the birds from pooping in it.

If your chicks have been vaccinated for coccidiosis or Marek's disease, can feed non-medicated feed. If not, use medicated feed for the first couple of months.

Can add chick scratch in addition to their starter feed.

Keep on starter feed for about 4- 6 weeks.

Can be fed small amounts of finely cut vegetables. Bugs, small worms as "dessert". Don't feed a lot of greens to babies.

Provide grit for all birds. Grit is available in chick and hen sizes. Grit allows birds to break down their feed in their crop before it enters their stomachs. Fine gravel can be substituted for purchased grit.

Provide water in specially designed water container. The small holes in the top of the waterer, keeps the chick from getting wet.

Keep an eye on their rears- check them for pasting up- this is a deadly condition and must be resolved immediately- use a damp, warm cloth to remove the poop from their rears. Dry with a hair dryer and place chick back in the brooder.

Young chicks

In about 3-4 weeks old fully feathered chicks can be placed the coop and yard. If adding to an existing flock, keep separate for a while and make sure that the young chicks can get away (as in run) from the older girls.

Outside temperatures should be at least 65-70 degrees.

If the weather turns cold and rainy, keep them inside until the weather warms up.

Young chicks/pullets will eat greens, table scraps, and anything that flies or moves. They are like teenagers. Keep them well fed.

Chicken yard/run

An enclosed yard allows chickens to roam during the day (without getting into your garden).

Have your yard and coop ready before you let your girls out.

If you have a totally fenced yard, and no garden, no plants that you like, then you might consider free range.

Chickens live to scratch and will move the earth (and stars) within the yard. Every living thing will be eaten. (it just takes longer with fewer hens)

Can feed hens outside but need permanent feeding station protected from rain and moisture inside their coop.

Plastic fencing for moving around or permanent- moving the yard allows hens to forage.

Can be fully enclosed top and bottom and attached to the coop.

The chicken coop

Shelter from the cold, heat, sun and rain.

A fully enclosed house, with a door to close at night. Should have a wire floor.

Your coop should provide protection from raccoons, possums and hawks and dogs.

Lots of great designs available!

Large enough to provide 3-4 square feet per hen plus their food and water, roosts, and hen boxes.

Start with a good design, think about how it gets cleaned. (by You!)

Think about how to clean the poop out of the house, and where you will collect it for use in your garden.

Feeders and waterers

Feeders come with a metal hanger and should be placed about 6" from the ground. This allows them to feed without getting in and scratching it out. Place the waterer on a brick or something equally tall.

Depending on how you design the coop and yard, you may be able to go away for a day or two and if you have large enough feeders and waterers, will know that they won't go hungry or thirsty.

Size of both really is determined on how many chickens you have, will have, and how often you fill both.

Roosts

Hens like to roost and will jump up to a roost in the coop. They have a pecking order on the roost too! Provide a low roost for older girls.

Provide roosts poles 2" wide, rounded with about 10" of space side to side. Place at several heights and about 10" apart.

Egg boxes

Provide nesting box for every 4-5 hens. Raise off the floor and place them out of the way. (a clean dark place to lay one's egg)

Use straw or pine wood shavings (not cedar) for boxes. Keep fresh to encourage hens to use boxes for laying only. (not for sleeping)

As the pullets get older and closer to laying, you may want to place an egg in the box to encourage the hens to lay in the box, rather than on the floor or outside.

When you first introduce your girls to the coop and yard, keep them in the coop for a couple of days. This will teach them that this is "home"

Chickens do not see well at night and as soon as it starts getting dark will migrate to the coop.

Caring for grown chickens- "the girls"

Daily

Keep waterers and feeders full.

Collect and refrigerate eggs. Pointy side down.

Check on the condition of your girls. They should be active, bright and healthy. A bird that does not leave the coop, or hangs out by herself is not feeling well.

Provide good sanitation for healthy birds. Clean water, food and a clean house.

Monthly

Change the bedding in the coop and in the egg/ nest boxes. Ammonia build up is dangerous to poultry and cause respiratory illness.

Scrub out your waterer. Algae may grow in warm weather.

Remove feces from the coop. Let it "cure" a while before using in your garden.

Twice a year- pick a nice warm day.

Scrub your coop clean. Remove bedding, nest materials, feed and waterers.

Clean with 1 part bleach, 1 part dish soap, 10 parts water. Let dry and replace with a fresh supply

Chicken Feed

Keep the chicken feed in metal containers. Protect from mice and rats.

Chicken feed is available in pellets, crumbles or mash. The type just depends on what you think is easier to store and handle.

What are pullets???

Young hens are called pullets from about 2 months to 1 year.

Switch feed from chick starter to pullet grower or lay feed.

Provide lots of greens along with clean feed and water.

Add hen scratch to their diet.

Provide calcium for egg production. Oyster shell can be purchased at a feed store and placed so that hens have access to it.

When will pullets start laying eggs?

April chicks, September eggs

Pullets hatched in April will start laying eggs in approximately 150 days.

(Sunset's chickens started in 146 days- April issue, pg 48-50.)

Pullet eggs are the cutest! Place an egg in the box when time gets near.

(ceramic, or a real one)

Eggs will get larger

Look for double yolks

What is all that cackling in the yard?

Hens seem to like announcing their eggs. All the girls join in to let your neighbors know of the event. (yes, it's just an egg)

Fall molting- a girl needs a new outfit!

Feathers start falling out, exposing their skin. Not a pretty sight!

Egg production goes down if not stops.

Make sure that your hens have access to oyster shells all the time, especially now.

Bird baths

Dusting in dirt (to a gardener it's soil, to a chicken, it's dirt)
Chickens create a small depression in the ground by scratching, scratch up some dirt into very fine particles, then roll their wings and body in the dirt to rid themselves of mites and lice. Bath time! It's just like what small wild birds do on a nice warm day!

Daylight and egg production

As the seasons change and there is less daylight, egg laying slow down. It picks up again in the spring. (some egg production farms keep lights on 24 hours a day,)

How long does a chicken live?

Well cared for chickens can live a long time! 8-12 years and some exceptional hens live even longer!!

How long will a hen lay?

Hens will lay several eggs a week for up to five years. When they start laying, it's almost a egg a day but it tapers off when fall and winter arrive. Hens can lay for up to about 8 years. Becomes very inconsistent.

What to do with sick chickens?

Always isolate the sick one. Provide water and feed.

Make an appointment with a vet.

Identify the symptoms:

Mangy appearance- ruffled feathers, change in comb color, dull eyes

Visible mites

Abnormal stool

Sneezing

Loss of energy or depression

Sudden, drastic reduction in position in pecking order

Loss of appetite

Stunted growth

Refer to "The Chicken Health Handbook" by Gail Damerow.

Your backyard chickens- a complete circle for a gardener!

