



Getting Started with Backyard Chickens

Presented by Kim Garner, UC Master Gardener, at the 2013 Sustainability Fair

CONSIDERATIONS & STEPS:

- Everything about a chicken is recyclable.
- Chickens are omnivores and will eat leftovers, weeds, and bugs.
- Before beginning, research city and county rules and ordinances.
 - Most cities DO NOT allow Roosters.
 - You do not need a rooster to enjoy fresh eggs.
- Consider that hens lay regularly for about 3 yrs. but live 8-10 yrs.
 - What will you do with the hen once she stops laying? Pet? Process?
- Consider whether you have enough room in your yard? For healthy, happy hens, meet or exceed these minimum space requirements:
 - Inside coop (nesting/sleeping area), you'll need about 4 sq. ft. per hen
 - Outside coop ("run"), you'll need about 10 sq. ft. per hen.
- Build/buy a coop/run and keep it maintained.
 - Include a roost or perch inside the coop. Chickens like sleeping up off the ground.
 - Keep them safe from predators (dogs, raccoons, hawks, etc.)!
 - Floor materials: dirt, cement, woodchips/shavings, sand.
 - Bedding materials: wood shavings (not cedar).
 - Change bedding materials weekly; add used bedding and manure to your compost pile.
 - A dry clean coop will not smell.
- Select your hen(s):
 - How many you need is based on family size. They will lay about one egg every day or two.
 - Select a breed based on your needs. You can research this using the breed chart at backyardchickens.com
- Purchase your baby chicks online or at a local feed store.
- Care for your baby chicks. They need special attention at first.
 - Use a brooder box with bedding and heat lamp.
 - Set heat lamp to 90 degrees for the first week
 - Lower the temperature 5 degrees each week until you reach room temperature.
 - After about 6 weeks, your chicks will be fully feathered and can move into the coop.
 - After four months, change their feed to layer pellets.
 - After six months, they will start laying eggs.
- Enjoy healthy fresh eggs.



GETTING STARTED—EQUIPMENT LIST

BABY CHICKS:

- Brooder box—you can use a cardboard box, rabbit cage, or large plastic tub
- Bedding for brooder box—straw, corn cob bedding, wood shavings (not cedar), shredded newspaper
- Wire cover for brooder box—to keep chicks from jumping out, protect them from cats
- Heat lamp
- Waterer—but not too deep or they will drown
- Feeder
- Thermometer
- Baby chick food

HENS:

- Enclosed, safe coop-nesting box, run, roost/perch
- Bedding for chicken coop
- Feeder—start with layer pellets at 4 months
- Waterer—they drink lots of water
- Egg cartons—start to collect egg boxes so you can share fresh eggs with your neighbors & family

RESOURCES:

<https://www.backyardchickens.com/>—Breed charts, coop ideas and designs, chicken blog and forum

<https://www.mypetchicken.com/>—Web store. Purchase chickens and equipment.

Keep Chickens, by Barbara Kilarski

Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens, by Gail Damerow