

# FABULOUS FOWL

There are many factors to consider when selecting a breed. But backyardchickens.com suggests that climate hardiness is one of the most important considerations when choosing a chicken breed. The following breeds are flourishing in Sonoma County under the care of two of our Sonoma County Master Gardeners – but there are many more breeds that thrive in our mild climate.



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Breeds: Buff Wyandotte, Buff Orpington  
(closest to hand)

Janet's "Winnie" and "Buffy."

Handling ability (flightiness) is important to some chicken handlers. How friendly do you want to be with your chickens? Some breeds are too flighty for the small spaces in many urban backyards. Check out the breed's characteristics before purchasing.

Trimming the flight feathers on one wing will make it difficult for them to fly.

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Breed: Buff Orpington

Land ho! How cute is this little lady?!

Orpingtons are smart and good mothers (what chicken keepers refer to as "broodiness"). "Buffy" follows Janet around when she is gardening and loves to dine on slugs, potato bugs and earthworms when she finds them. While Orpingtons' egg production is rated as low, they are very calm birds and are well-suited to most climates.

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Breeds: l-r, Golden Lace Wyandotte, Scarlett Dominque and Buff Orpington—AKA Peanut, Scarlett and Daisy.

Chickens are social animals who enjoy the company of their flock but they do have a social structure – which is from where the term “pecking order” came. They know their rank. But there can be some pecking disputes if a fowl upsets the order—which often is quickly restored.

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Breed: Ameracauna (Easter Egger). Hardy in heat or cold, this breed has predator awareness, medium egg production and foraging capability – the last an important consideration if free-range chicken is your desire.

Janet’s “Azalea” is friendly and alert but sometimes flighty. This breed calms down once they are old enough to start laying. Their beautiful blue and/or olive-tinted eggs are real jewels!

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A sturdy coop will provide your chickens with predator protection and comfort (warm, but ventilated). Not only does it need to be chicken-friendly, it must be human accessible for egg collecting, cleaning, etc. Plus, most localities have building specifications.

Janet’s coop © 2014 Laura Salo-Long



Sue's hens reside in Chez Poulet – tres chic.

Janet and Sue opted for permanent housing for their hens. The sturdiness of permanent coops are a plus during bad weather and they can be outfitted with electrical outlets (e.g., winter lights provide warmth and extended laying). A sturdy structure provide protection from predators. Structures can be expensive to construct or purchase and regular cleaning is required for the health of the flock.



There is an alternative option that's gaining popularity: a tractor coop. This is a lightweight mobile alternative that allows the abode to be relocated in the garden providing fresh grass and snacks when moved (and no cleaning). These are more inexpensive to construct. However, tractor coops are not usually air and water tight and may allow easier predator access. Colder weather requires winterizing.

There is a lot to think about when planning for chicken keeping.

Sue's coop © 2014 Laura Salo-Long



Breeds: l-r, Auburn Java, Buff Wyandotte and Buff Orpington

Most localities dictate a maximum number of chickens in the urban backyard (e.g., in 2014, Santa Rosa allows up to three chickens in a lot size of 5000 sq. ft. or less). Check with your local planning commission before you begin buying chickens and accessories.

Some people select chickens for their ornamentability – like the laced feathers of the Wyandottes. There is a breed to strike everyone's fancy.

Janet's hens © 2014 Laura Salo-Long



Breeds: l-r, Golden Lace Wyandotte, Scarlet Dominque (Dominicker) and Buff Orpington.

Dominque (the oldest breed in America)—with medium egg production and medium flightiness—are well-suited for most climates.

Hens need to become used to being around people when they are young. We're guessing this friendly trio got a lot of play time when they were chicks.

Sue's hens © 2014 Laura Salo-Long



Breed: Buff Wyandotte. Wyandottes have high egg production, are calm and are frequently "broody" (i.e., good mothers). But they do not tolerate high heat climates well.

Janet's hen "Winnie" is surrounded by yummy lambs ears (Stachys), a water thrifty groundcover to plant in chicken gardens around shrubs and perennials to protect their roots from scratching chicken feet!

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Egg color makes no difference in taste. The color of eggs is based on breed. Ameracauna (Easter Egger) typically lays blue eggs but also green or just about any color; and Java, Rhode Island Red, Wyandotte, Dominique and Orpington, brown. For more info and egg color photos, see:

<http://www.backyardchickens.com/a/egg-color-chart-find-out-what-egg-color-your-breed-lays>.

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Breed: Buff Wyandotte and Auburn Java

Janet's "Winnie" and "Java."

Janet has no roosters (roosters are banned in her city limits). Hens do not need a rooster to lay eggs. Remember that roosters are noisier and, if you have more than one, can be territorial (i.e., fight). But, having one rooster can be a plus as he will be protective of the hens.

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Breeds: l-r, Buff Orpington, Rhode Island Red and Ameracauna eating oat sprouts.

Janet's "Buffy," "Scarlett" and "Azalea."

Plant greens such as chard, kale, dandelion purslane, parsley, sorrel and lemon balm that they will enjoy and to supplement their diet.

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Breed: Rhode Island Red

Janet's "Scarlett."

Rhode Island Reds are large hardy birds (hens average 6.5 pounds) that have high egg production—most start laying at 5 to 6 months of age, have foraging capability (free range) and have average flightiness. They are best-suited for cooler climates.

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For more information about and resources for chicken keeping, see Sonoma County Master Gardener Janet Barocco's article: "Flock-Friendly Landscapes: Gardening with Chickens."

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