

How To Keep Chickens

A Guide To Raising Chickens In Your Backyard

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Benefits Of Keeping Chickens

You may, like many others, have decided to raise chickens in your backyard. Or you may already be keeping chickens in your yard. In either case, you should be aware of the benefits of raising chickens.

These are some of the benefits of keeping chickens in your backyard.

Eggs Are Safer

There is evidence that suggests that battery eggs have a higher amount of salmonella, making these eggs harmful through prolonged intake. As a chicken owner, you can have full control over what your chickens eat, meaning the eggs produced by your chickens can be safer. You can ensure that your chickens are getting the proper vitamins and nutrients, producing healthier eggs.

You Can Save Money

If you have three or more chickens producing eggs, this can save you the trouble and expense of buying chickens at your local grocery store. With proper nourishment and care, an average hen can lay 300 eggs per year. If you have more hens, you'll be getting more eggs.

Chicken Waste Can Be Used As Fertilizer

Chicken waste is one of the best fertilizers that you can find, since it contains high amounts of nutrients and nitrogen. These can help your garden produce vegetables faster. Chicken waste is also organic, ensuring that your crops will be free of harmful chemicals. Another advantage for the garden, is that chickens feed on bugs that can wreak havoc on your garden.

Chickens Make Good Pets

Many breeds of hen, especially the bantam types, are very docile, as well as having beautiful plumage. Other varieties of chickens may be visually appealing as well, notably Barred Rocks, Wyandottes, and Orpingtons. Go on the internet, and look up photos of certain breeds, and find one that is to your liking. Chickens come in a wide array of colors. Chickens may not be as smart

as dogs, but they can be very playful and friendly pets. If trained well, some chickens may eventually even learn some tricks.

There are still more benefits of raising chickens in your backyard. Simply go on the internet, and look around. Learning more can help you to maximize the benefits, and to keep your chickens healthy and happy.

Keeping Chickens As Pets

These days, chickens are no longer kept only for their eggs and their meat. People have begun to take a liking to chickens for their domestic appeal. Some even get a sense of kinship with their chickens, similar to the kinship that people get with cats and dogs.

Before you decide you want to keep chickens as pets, you need to check local zoning laws. Some localities prohibit housing farm animals. Others have limits on the number of chickens you may raise in your backyard, and some areas allow hens, but prohibit roosters. Once you verify that you are allowed to raise chickens, then you'll need to choose which breed you would like to raise.

With chickens, a bit of visual appeal will certainly help in sparking interest in raising chickens as a pet. Chickens come in a wide variety of colors and styles. Go online, and look up certain breeds, and find a variety that appeals to you. Go into the poultry building at your local fair, and look at the variety of chickens on display. When you choose a breed, be sure that you choose one that appeals to you. It will be your responsibility to make sure the chickens are well cared for. The more interest you have in your chickens, the more likely you are to give them the attention that they need.

If you have children that will be hanging around the chicken coop, you may want to choose bantam chickens. Children will be less likely to be afraid of the smaller breeds, and will be drawn to them, much as they would be to smaller pets such as cats and rabbits.

You'll want to start with young chickens, preferably day old chicks. This will give the bird plenty of time to get used to people, and used to being handled.

Hens generally make better pets than roosters, since hens are more docile. Another obvious advantage to raising hens, is the steady supply of eggs. Sexing a chicken is not necessarily easy, so you will want the help of a chick sexer, to determine whether your chicks are cocks or hens.

Pet chickens will need to have plenty of space to roam around. You will also need to set up some perches, since a chicken's instincts are to roost and to sleep on an elevated surface. You should also scatter some dirt around, since chickens love to dig and scratch.

You'll want to feed your chickens with special treats from time to time. You can give them worms, fish, table scraps, etc. Feeding them from your hand will help to tame the chickens as they grow. When you feed them from your hand, they will come to associate you as a source of food, clucking in anticipation when they see you.

Keeping Chickens For Egg Production

Obviously, if you keep chickens for pets, you can also keep them for their eggs. You can save money raising chickens for their eggs, as opposed to buying your eggs. If you want to raise chickens for their eggs, however, you do need to have a plan on how you feed the chicken, their environment, and stress management, so that you can get the best results.

You will want to choose the proper breed of chicken for egg laying. Some chickens start laying eggs earlier than others. Leghorns are the earliest, laying eggs at about 5 months old. Bantams and silkies will start laying in about 8 months. Keep these factors in mind so you can prepare before the eggs start pouring in. Hens that have just started laying will lay eggs in a haphazard fashion, but will soon develop a normal rhythm. Most commercial hens are replaced after two years, but you can collect eggs from the hens throughout their lives. Eventually, however, the hens will slow down their egg production as they get older, and eventually stop.

There are some reasons why a chicken may stop laying eggs, that you will need to be aware of, so that you will know when to act, and when to just let things run their course.

MOLTING

Molting is a natural process, where chickens shed their feathers, and grow new feathers. This normally happens during the autumn/fall, and takes about a month. Once they've grown new feathers, egg production should start as normal.

BROODING

There comes a time in the cycle of a hen's life when it starts to stay in its nest box and not move around. This is called brooding, which can cause your hen to stop laying eggs for some time. It takes about two to three weeks before the hen can snap out of its "catatonia" and start laying eggs again.

STRESS

It's been proven that the least stressed hens produce better eggs, and that stress affects the quantity of eggs a chicken can produce. A favorable environment and constant companionship for your chickens can alleviate this problem.

Chickens can keep themselves warm, through an internal mechanism. This uses up energy, which is normally used for laying eggs. In the winter, you should take steps to keep the chicken coop warm, so that the chickens have more energy available for laying eggs. A heat lamp or two can help to keep the hens warm, just put it in a safe place, where the chickens can't reach it and burn themselves.

As previously mentioned, a chicken's egg production starts to slow down as it ages, stopping at about 5 years. When this happens, you can consider the chicken retired, and simply let it live out the rest of its life as a pet, or in some cases, it may be time for the chicken to become dinner.

What to Do with All Those Eggs

The primary reason for raising hens is for their eggs. It sometimes happens, though, that the supply of eggs exceeds the demand. Once the hens start to lay, there may be more eggs than you need. So what do you do with those extra eggs?

One solution, which can provide you with a bit of extra money, is to sell them. You can sell the eggs through Farm Gate Selling. This is a legal way to get rid of excess farm products. There are some things to keep in mind if you choose to sell the eggs through Farm Gate Selling.

First of all, you have to advertise and promote your eggs for sale. You can put out a sign announcing your eggs for sale. As people start buying your eggs regularly, you may also need another sign to announce that you are sold out.

Once you advertise your eggs, make sure that you legalize everything in order to start selling the eggs. You have to do some things to ensure people that your eggs are safe.

First of all, write down the production date of the eggs that you are selling. Typically, the eggs can be stored for three weeks before they go bad. A production date sign on your egg stand can solve a lot of problems. You will need to put the production date and the “best before” date, to assure people that you are selling fresh eggs.

Ask your regular customers to place their orders upfront, so you can set aside the eggs for them. This is not only an effective way to sell eggs, but other farm products as well.

Make sure that you are displaying moderate sized eggs, not too big or too small. This way, the eggs will be accepted by all buyers. If they need bigger or smaller eggs, ask them to give you a note when they order upfront, so that you can give them the size and quantity that they need.

You also want to choose clean eggs. A little bit of spot on the shell may be acceptable, but you should strive to choose clean eggs for display. You can easily clean the eggs by rubbing them gently with steel wool. Do not use soap.

Selling your excess eggs will easily cut down on the costs of raising your chickens, and perhaps even exceed your costs, providing a bit of profit.

Keeping Chickens For Meat

Chicken is a popular food choice for consumers, especially since people are eating more white meat, and less red meat. Chicken is easily available in the supermarket, but keeping chickens for meat consumption is becoming common not only on farms, but in urban areas. While you are raising the chickens, you can get free eggs, but you can also have full control over the dietary intake of your chickens, knowing that they are free of harmful chemicals.

Before you start, you want to choose the breed of chicken that you're going to raise, taking into consideration the cost of feeding, and rapidity of growth. Sussex and Plymouth breeds will provide a lot of meat. If you want something in between, you can choose a hybrid breed. Check out the internet, and do your research, and find out which breed will suit your needs.

When you buy chickens, you can either buy full grown chickens, or you can buy newborn chicks. If you want the full grown chickens, make sure that you check their vaccination records. If you buy chicks, they will need eight weeks of feeding before they are ready for slaughter. If you buy a few roosters, then your hens can lay fertilized eggs, producing the next generation of chickens, to replace the ones that are destined for the dinner table.

You will need to build a chicken coop for your flock, either a large permanent coop, or a smaller portable coop that can be moved around your backyard or garden. The portable coops allow you to move them around the yard, choosing a spot where the chickens can eat weeds and bugs.

You will need to regularly clean the coop to prevent diseases. You should also place a few perches around the coop, so the chickens will have a place to roost. The chicken coop also needs to be safe from temperature extremes. You can buy a chicken coop or a kit, but you can also find chicken coop plans on line, and save money by building your own chicken coop. A couple of good sources for chicken coop plans are:

[Building A Chicken Coop](#)

[How To Build A Chicken Coop](#)

[D.I.Y. Chicken Coop Plans](#)

You will need to provide fresh water for your chickens at all times. You can buy automatic waterers which will release fresh drinking water at certain times of the day. They are easy to clean, and have an adjustable height for growing chicks.

When you are raising chickens for their meat, they need a lot of protein in their diet. Their feed should be 90% grains, like oats, barley, soybean meal, and other grain legumes. If you want to ensure that your chickens have the required nutritional balance, you can find Nutribalancers at the feed store.

Where to Get Those Chickens

When you go to buy chickens, remember that there are a number of species of chickens. Various species are bred for certain purposes. If you are new to buying chickens, then follow these tips to help you when you're shopping.

Learn about the different breeds before you actually start buying chickens. Chickens can be separated into three categories, pure breeds, egg laying hybrids, and mixed hybrids. Each category has certain qualities. Egg laying hybrids are obviously bred for laying eggs. Egg layers have smaller bodies and less meat, making them a poor choice if you're raising chickens for meat. Look around the internet, and see what breeds of chicken meet your needs.

A chicken breeder is the first place you should go if you want to buy chickens. You want to be sure to buy from a reputable breeder. Get references from local farmers or neighbors who own chickens. Check out several breeders, and look at their stock, and the living conditions of the chickens. If the chickens look unhealthy, move on to the next breeder.

A number of hatcheries will sell chickens online. As with local breeders, find a hatchery that is reputable. Again ask local farmers for references. Hatcheries will not ship chicks in the winter, when the weather is too cold for the little ones. Chicken deliveries for spring are usually booked well in advance, so you want to get your orders in early for spring delivery.

Your chickens should be active, vocal and energetic. Chicks should have a full coat of feathers, without any bald spots. Contact the breeder or hatchery immediately if you see any signs of illness.

If you order your chicks online, you may not get the chicks for a day or two. They will arrive quite hungry and thirsty, so you'll want to make sure that you have water and feed ready when they arrive.

Be sure to follow these steps before buying chickens online or from a reputable breeder. If you want to raise healthy and happy chickens, you need to start making sure that they are healthy right from the beginning.

What will Your Chickens Eat?

Food for tiny chickens is different than the food that you will give adult chickens. You need to feed your chickens the right amount of feed, and the right type of feed. Doing so, will insure that they grow healthy, preventing the spread of disease. Many chicken owners give their chickens a specially formulated chicken feed, but many times a homemade chicken feed can lack nutritional content. If you are feeding your chickens a homemade food, then you should ensure that the ingredients are fresh, and chemical free.

Use the best quality starter chicken feed for baby chicks. The best kind is known as chicken starter feed, and can be found at your local poultry shop.

Vegetarian poultry mixes are not the best choice, since chickens need animal protein to grow. In nature, baby chicks would also be eating bugs, providing them protein. Ideally, you should let the chickens roam around, and eat all the bugs, plants, and weeds that they can find, giving them the maximum nutrition. Since this isn't always possible, you should stick to chicken feed from your local feed store.

Pre-made commercial chicken feed will also eliminate the headache of trying to figure out what to give the chickens. Pre-made chicken feeds have a healthy balance of nutrients for your chickens. Pre-made feeds will have a balance of protein, vitamins, minerals and other elements that your chickens need.

The label of the feed will tell you how suitable the feed is for each stage of the chickens' development. It will also give you nutritional information, and how much should be fed to the chickens. Pre-made feeds are sufficient for your chickens, and additional vitamins are not needed.

You can occasionally feed your chickens table scraps. Table scraps consisting of grains can be given as treats when you are training your chickens. Giving such treats on a daily basis is not advised, however. It can interfere with the chickens' daily food. You can also give them treats of lettuce, tomato, or other fruits and vegetables.

Chickens will usually eat until they are full. To ensure this, check the feeder, and top it off in the morning and in the late afternoon. The chickens will eat when they are hungry, and leave the rest when they are full. Clean the feed containers every day, and make sure they have fresh food.

If you can't get chicken starter feed, then breakfast cereal or mashed hard boiled eggs will do for a few days. But you should get the chickens on the starter feed as soon as possible.

You need to give your chickens fresh and clean water every day. If your chickens get dehydrated, they can die. Ideally the waterer will be elevated to keep chicken droppings from the water. You should change the water at least twice a day, or whenever it gets dirty. The water should be kept at around 90 degrees F., to keep the chickens from getting cold.

Building A Chicken Coop For Keeping Chickens

If you want to keep chickens in your backyard, a chicken coop is essential. You will want a chicken coop to keep your chickens safe from weather and from potential predators.

Building your own chicken coop is not that expensive. If you buy a ready made chicken coop, you could be spending up to \$300 or more. You don't have to spend that much if you build one yourself. Just be aware of the important elements of a chicken coop.

Before you start, you should sketch out your design on paper first. Or you can find chicken coop plans in many places online. These websites are good sources for chicken coop plans.

[Building A Chicken Coop](#)

[How To Build A Chicken Coop](#)

[D.I.Y. Chicken Coop Plans](#)

When you're ready to install the chicken coop, make sure that it is easy to clean and disinfect. A floor that slopes slightly down towards the door will allow water to flow out when you hose down the inside of the coop to clean it.

A properly built chicken coop will protect your chickens from the elements. The coop should be well ventilated, yet at the same time, be safe from drafts. If too much moisture builds up in the coop, ammonia can accumulate and cause health problems. Try to position the coop where it faces the sun, this way, the sun will dry the ground, and prevent a buildup of moisture.

The coop should be properly insulated, to keep the chickens warm in the winter, and cool in the summer, and keep them dry as well. This will minimize the chance of your chickens getting sick. This is certainly of vital importance if you are raising chickens specifically for egg production.

You will want to keep the chickens safe from predators, by surrounding the coop with strong chicken wire, including a screening system around the doors

and windows for extra protection. Bury the chicken wire around the coop at least one foot deep, to prevent entry by burrowing predators.

Have a designated spot within the coop for the feeders and waterers. Since chickens love to scratch with their feet, they can scatter food all over the place. Set up the waterers and feeders at the level of their necks which will keep spilling to a minimum. Be sure to give the chickens fresh food and water daily.

Cardboard Box or Chicken Brooder?

A cardboard box is a relatively inexpensive home for baby chicks. There are, however, several types of chicken brooders available to keep those little chicks warm and dry. You should have some type of chicken brooder until the chickens can be left in the chicken coop

The brooder needs to be cleaned every day, and food and water need to be available for the chicks at all times.

If you are using a commercial chicken brooder, it will need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before you place the chicks inside. If you are using a cardboard box, it should be at least 12 inches high, to keep the chicks from jumping out. A mesh cover can help prevent this, but it would need to be made of mesh, to allow light and air into the box.

You also need to consider size when you choose a chicken brooder. Remember the chicks are going to be growing, so you will want one that will accommodate all of them until they are ready for the chicken coop. Ideally, the brooder should allow 2 square feet for each chick. This will ensure that they have plenty of space to grow.

Drafts can harm the little chicks, so you will want to keep the brooder out of any drafty area. Chicks don't need precise temperature control, but keep in mind that some exotic species may require specific temperatures. For this reason, a brooder is a better choice than a cardboard box. For new chicks, less than a week old, the temperature should be kept at 90 degrees F. This temperature can be reduced as the weeks go by.

Whether you use a brooder or a cardboard box, it needs to be completely dry before it is lined properly. It also needs to be cleaned every day, to remove the chicken droppings. This will help keep the chicks healthy and happy, and maintain an hygienic environment in the brooder.

If there are only a few chicks, you can line the brooder with paper towels. You could also use burlap, or shredded newspapers, sawdust, wood shavings, peat moss, or clean sand. You should have a layer of lining at least two inches thick, to give the chicks a better foothold, and make the surface non-slippery.

You will need a heat lamp if you are using a cardboard box, to keep the chicks warm. Use a red light, rather than white, as white light can hurt the chicks. A 250-watt infrared light can also keep them warm. Make sure there is sufficient distance between the lamp and the chicks, so that the chicks will not be too hot or too cold. If the chicks are huddled under the lamp, you'll need to move the lamp closer. If you see the chicks moving towards the edge of the box, away from the lamp, then move it farther away.

You can find lamps and reflectors at your local hardware store. Commercial chicken brooders come with thermostats and temperature controls, which eliminates the need to check on the chickens constantly to see that they are warm enough.

Commercial brooders will have feeders and waterers ideally placed, and clamped so that they cannot tip over. In a cardboard box, you will need a heavy base for the feeder and waterer, so that the chicks cannot tip them over, and get wet. If the chicks become wet, they can die very easily.

Whether you choose a cheap cardboard box, or buy a commercial brooder, you will want to follow the above steps to ensure that your chicks will grow up healthy and happy.

Keep Those Nesting Boxes Soft

There are two reasons that most people breed chickens. Most people breed them for meat production or for egg production. If you are breeding the chickens for egg production, you will need nesting boxes. Nesting boxes are small boxes added to a chicken coop in order to provide the hens a place to lay eggs.

You will need to determine the number of nesting boxes that you will need in your chicken coop. You should have one nesting box for every 2 to 4 chickens, guaranteeing that each hen will have a place to lay its eggs.

After you know the number of nesting boxes, you will need to choose a layout for them. The nesting boxes should be arranged in rows above each other, making it easy to collect eggs. Build the nesting boxes big enough for only one chicken at a time, to minimize cracking and fouling of the eggs.

It is a good idea to have a door at the back of the nests to make it easy to collect the eggs. This will decrease the need to enter the coop, and make things less disturbing for the hens.

There should be a lip on each nesting box to prevent the bedding from spilling out of the nest, keeping the coop clean. A lip, obviously, will also help to keep the chickens from accidentally kicking the eggs out of the nesting box.

You will need to fill the nests with bedding for the hens. Keep the bedding clean, and change it from time to time. If the nesting box is not clean, or if it is damp, then the chickens will lay their eggs elsewhere.

You can use straw or wood shavings for bedding in the chicken nesting boxes. Wood shavings are a better choice, providing an extra dry surface for the hens to lay their eggs on. Wood shavings also provide a good support to the eggs, and keeps them from cracking. Again, you'll want to make sure to change the bedding clean, and make sure that it stays dry.

Raising hens for eggs will keep you supplied with eggs all year round. You need to maintain the health of your chickens, though, to keep them laying on a constant basis. Good quality nesting boxes will go a long way in keeping your

chickens healthy, so don't go cheap on the nesting boxes. Get the best ones that you can afford, and keep your chickens healthy and happy.

Keeping those Chickens Away from the Doctor

Although chickens are generally hardy birds, they can still get sick. There are several ways in which you can prevent this..

Vaccinations provide active immunity

Day old chickens need to be vaccinated against various diseases, such as Marek's disease. Vaccinations, as in humans, will help the immune system to produce antibodies, helping the chickens to fight off diseases.

The hen can pass on immunity to the egg. If the hen has a high level of antibodies, they can be passed into the yolk, and the fluids in the egg. This will help the chick to resist many diseases for a few weeks. You should know the antibody levels in your hens, so that you can schedule the vaccinations for the chicks at an appropriate time. If the chicks already have a high level of antibodies when they hatch, a vaccination at that time, may actually cause a reduced response to the vaccination.

Bio security program implementation

When you own poultry, you should also be aware of bio security. You should understand how diseases can be transferred in poultry, and take steps to prevent the spread of disease. A good bio security program will not stop disease from happening, but it can reduce the spread of the disease.

Disinfections of the coop and other materials that come in contact with the chickens

Keeping the coop clean and disinfected will go a long way in preventing the chickens from getting sick, and in preventing the spread of disease. Be sure to clean the coop on a regular basis, and keep the food and water clean and fresh. You may even go so far as to disinfect the shoes of anyone who enters the chicken coop, as an extra measure to prevent the spread of disease.

If you find mice in your chicken coop, then set out mousetraps immediately. Obviously, you will want to place them where they will trap the mice, and not your chickens.

Ensure that the food and the water bowls are cleaned everyday

Cleaning the food and water bowls regularly will go a long way in controlling the spread of disease that can spread through bird droppings in the water. Bacteria can grow very easily if the water bowl is not cleaned regularly. Bacteria and protozoa in the water and food can be extremely harmful to your poultry. You should never use the water and food bowls for other animals on the farm, and you should never use other animals' food and water bowls for your chickens.

Keep the young and old population separately

Baby chickens do not have the same immunity as older chickens, and can get sick when they are exposed to adult chickens. Keep your younger chickens separate from your older chickens. You should also ensure that wild birds do not enter the coop, as they can spread diseases that can easily kill your chickens.

It only takes a few simple steps to keep your chickens from getting sick, and to prevent diseases from spreading through your flock. Keep an eye on your chickens, and if any of them look sick, separate them from the rest of the chickens, and keep an eye on the rest of the flock, to make sure they have not contracted the same illness.

Conclusion

Growing chickens in your backyard can be a very rewarding experience. Chickens can make great pets, since birds tend to be very social animals. A flock of chickens can also supply a source of eggs and meat.

Chickens are not difficult to raise. Just do some research, and find out more about their needs, and how to keep them safe and healthy. [Incredible Chickens](#) and [Chicken Keeping Secrets](#) are a some good e-books on raising chickens in your backyard.

Resources

[Building A Chicken Coop](#)

[How To Build A Chicken Coop](#)

[D.I.Y. Chicken Coop Plans](#)

[Incredible Chickens](#)

[Chicken Keeping Secrets](#)

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