* **[HGTV URBAN OASIS 2019](https://www.hgtv.com/design/hgtv-urban-oasis)**
* [**A VERY BRADY RENOVATION**](https://www.hgtv.com/shows/a-very-brady-renovation)
* [**WEDDINGS + $25K SWEEPS**](https://www.hgtv.com/design/ultimate-wedding-guide)
* [**HALLOWEEN**](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/halloween)
* [**SHOP**](https://www.hgtv.com/shopping)
* [**WATCH FULL SEASONS**](https://watch.hgtv.com/?utm_source=marketingsite&utm_medium=trendingline_watchfullseasons_text)
* [Home](https://www.hgtv.com/)

* [Outdoors](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors)

* [Gardens](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens)

* [Animals and Wildlife](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens/animals-and-wildlife)

What Do Chickens Eat?

Chickens eat a surprising array of foods. Find out how to keep them happy and healthy.

* Pinterest
* [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-do-chickens-eat)
* [Twitter](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=What+Do+Chickens+Eat%3f&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-do-chickens-eat&original_referer=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-do-chickens-eat)
* [Email](mailto:?body=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-do-chickens-eat&subject=Shared%20from%20HGTV)

By: [Mick Telkamp](https://www.hgtv.com/profiles/editorial/mick-telkamp)

Related To:

[Chickens](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/chickens-and-homesteading)[Homesteading](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/homesteading)

Chickens are omnivores and enjoy a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains and even table scraps.

Chickens are omnivores and will eat (or try to eat) just about anything they can get their beaks on. When ranging in the yards, chickens will find a cornucopia of protein- and vitamin-rich food on their own, including insects and grubs, vegetation and seeds. Fairly indiscriminate, they may even sample such yard fare as skinks, toads or small snakes before determining it is not to their taste. During warmer months, a substantial portion of a chicken’s diet may come from foraging, although free-ranging is not required for a backyard brood to enjoy a healthy, balanced diet.

In warm weather or cold, the primary food for backyard chickens should be layer feed. Available in pellet or crumble form, chicken feed is formulated to provide laying chickens with the nutritional requirements to keep them healthy and consistently producing well-formed eggs. Protein and calcium are key, but commercial feeds also provide a range of vitamins and minerals essential to the health of a chicken.

Supplementing their diet is still important, especially in cold weather when their food intake needs to be higher and foraging is not an option. Select fruits, vegetables and grains will keep chickens happy and ensure they are receiving a nutritionally balanced diet. Good choices include leafy greens, cooked beans, corn, non-sugary cereals and grains, berries, apples and most other fruits and vegetables.

Despite often voracious appetites and a willingness to eat just about anything you might give them, there are some foods to be avoided. Citrus fruits, rhubarb, avocado, uncooked beans, green potato skins and onions are all unhealthy or even poisonous to chickens. Strong flavors that come from some vegetables like garlic can affect the flavor of eggs and should also be avoided.

Saving table scraps is an easy and affordable way to augment the diet of your flock and to cut down on food waste. Most of what you eat will also appeal to the chicken palate, including meat scraps (although I can’t quite bring myself to feed leftover chicken to my chickens—it just seems so wrong). Once you begin to set aside scraps for the “girls,” you may be surprised by just how much food was going to waste. Avoid sharing high-sugar treats, high-fat foods, or salty snacks and don’t pass along food that has spoiled.

Once chickens have been factored into the equation when it comes to leftovers and other treats, it can be easy to go overboard. As with people, moderation is key. A steady diet of commercial layer feed will give chickens the basic nutrition they need. Small amounts of “a la carte” treats can keep birds happy and provide enough variety to have a positive impact on the health of the flock. The rest is just gravy. And yes, chickens will eat gravy.

Go Shopping

Spruce up your outdoor space with products handpicked by HGTV editors.

[**These Budget-Friendly Decor Items Will Instantly Improve Your Porch's Fall Curb Appeal**Oct 2, 2019](https://www.hgtv.com/design/outdoor-design/outdoor-spaces/decks--porches-and-patios/modern-budget-porch-decor-for-fall-curb-appeal)

[**Fall Front Porch Decor in Traditional Harvest Hues**15 Photos](https://www.hgtv.com/design/news-and-trends/traditional-fall-front-porch-decor-pictures)

[**15 Outdoor Doormats to Welcome Fall**15 Photos](https://www.hgtv.com/design/decorating/design-101/outdoor-doormats-for-fall-pictures)

Load More

On TV

On Tonight

[**Property Brothers**](https://www.hgtv.com/shows/property-brothers)

8pm | 7c

[**SEE FULL SCHEDULE**](https://www.hgtv.com/shows/tv-schedule)

HGTV Outdoors Newsletter

Get our best gardening advice and outdoor ideas delivered straight to your inbox. [Privacy Policy](http://www.scrippsnetworksinteractive.com/privacy-policy/)

Top of Form

 Sign Up

Bottom of Form

Follow Us Everywhere

Join the party! Don't miss HGTV in your favorite social media feeds.

* [Twitter](https://twitter.com/hgtv)
* [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/HGTV)
* [Pinterest](http://www.pinterest.com/hgtv/)
* [Instagram](http://instagram.com/hgtv/)
* [Home](https://www.hgtv.com/)

* [Outdoors](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors)

* [Gardens](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens)

* [Animals and Wildlife](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens/animals-and-wildlife)

Now Viewing

What to Expect When Chickens Molt

Autumn is a time for falling leaves...and feathers.

* Pinterest
* [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-when-chickens-molt)
* [Twitter](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=What+to+Expect+When+Chickens+Molt&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-when-chickens-molt&original_referer=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-when-chickens-molt)
* [Email](mailto:?body=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-when-chickens-molt&subject=Shared%20from%20HGTV)

By: [Mick Telkamp](https://www.hgtv.com/profiles/editorial/mick-telkamp)

Related To:

[Chickens](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/chickens-and-homesteading)[Homesteading](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/homesteading)

Molting is a natural process in which mature chickens lose their feathers and grow a new coat.

My nesting boxes are full of feathers instead of eggs this week.  Don’t panic. It’s normal. It’s healthy. But it sure ain’t pretty.  
  
Egg production was in high gear just a couple of weeks ago. My happy little backyard brood of nine chickens was producing half a dozen or more eggs each day. Even the birds I hatched in the spring had jumped on the bandwagon, already becoming consistent layers. I had more eggs than we could use, to the delight of the friends and neighbors reaping the benefits.

But now we’re down to just a few eggs a day. Although cheerful as ever, some of the girls have stopped laying and are starting to look pretty rough, as feathers fall like the autumn leaves.  
  
The molt is upon us.  
  
Over a period of four to eight weeks, these birds are going to drop all of their feathers. Some will lose them quickly, leaving them looking a little like that cartoon turkey that leaps up from the table and starts running around the room. Others may shed feathers gradually over a period of weeks, starting at the neck and underside and extending to the tail feathers and wings, leaving them looking patchy and maybe a little pathetic.  
  
If you don’t know what you’re looking at, molting is a little unsettling and could easily be mistaken for an illness. And indeed, if it occurs out of season or over an extended period,  it can be indicative of disease, problems in diet, or due to stress. But as the weather becomes cooler, molting is essential for the health of the backyard flock.  
  
Molting is a natural process in which mature chickens lose their feathers and grow a new coat. Generally occurring in the fall as the days grow shorter, egg production stops during this time of plumage renewal. Instead of laying, all of that energy is going toward getting those new feathers in place before the weather gets too chilly.  
  
Whether a hard or soft molt (fast or slow loss of feathers), it is crucial that adequate protein be offered in the chicken’s diet. A lot of energy goes into growing new feathers, which are 85% protein. Although most commercial feeds fit the bill, some may choose to switch to a feed with a higher protein content during the molt. Additionally, molting chickens will benefit from ranging opportunities. Grubs, worms and insects are all protein-rich chicken snacks.  
  
This molting time serves not only to renew feathering, it is also a recovery period for a hen who is finishing up an eleven month cycle of egg laying. During this time, diet should be consistent, protection from the elements provided, and efforts should be made to limit external stresses. Let her put her feet up. Maybe watch a little TV.  
  
She deserves it. It’s hard being a chicken.

* [Home](https://www.hgtv.com/)

* [Outdoors](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors)

* [Gardens](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens)

* [Animals and Wildlife](https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens/animals-and-wildlife)

Now Viewing

What to Expect From Your First Eggs

Find out what you need to know about your first chicken eggs.

* Pinterest
* [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-from-your-first-eggs)
* [Twitter](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=What+to+Expect+From+Your+First+Eggs&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-from-your-first-eggs&original_referer=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-from-your-first-eggs)
* [Email](mailto:?body=https%3a%2f%2fwww.hgtv.com%2foutdoors%2fgardens%2fanimals-and-wildlife%2fwhat-to-expect-from-your-first-eggs&subject=Shared%20from%20HGTV)

By: [Mick Telkamp](https://www.hgtv.com/profiles/editorial/mick-telkamp)

Related To:

[Chickens](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/chickens-and-homesteading)[Homesteading](https://www.hgtv.com/design/topics/homesteading)

The chicks I hatched last spring have finally reached full chickenhood. They’ve been accepted by the flock and today one of them laid her first egg.  
  
Can you guess which one is hers?  
  
When a chicken begins egg production, early results can be somewhat unpredictable. Laying cycles, typically 24 to 26 hours to produce a single egg, may swing wildly. Egg size may be unimpressive at first and occasionally you’ll get one with its membrane intact but lacking a shell.  
  
We’ll cut her some slack. Soon she’ll settle into a stable routine and will be laying over 250 eggs a year. For now, making a ten egg omelet is a small price to pay.  
  
With this increase in egg production here at the homestead, it seems like a good time to share a few facts about the incredible, edible egg.

Brown eggs are not “healthier” than white eggs.

Different breeds lay different colored eggs, but there is no difference in flavor or nutritional value. In the United States, the most common production breed is the Leghorn, which lays white eggs. In many other countries, brown is the standard for store bought eggs.

Dr. Seuss wouldn’t steer you wrong.

White and brown aren’t the only colors you’ll find in the nesting box. Blue, pink, and even green eggs are also commonly found among backyard [chicken breeds](http://www.ithaca.edu/staff/jhenderson/chooks/chooks.html).

Older chickens lay bigger eggs.

Although egg size varies between breeds, as a chicken ages her eggs will increase in size. Most breeds become less productive after 2 years, but will continue to lay for 5 or 6 years.

Yolk color is affected by diet.

Although the color does not indicate nutritional value in a significant way, a rich, vibrant color is the result of a varied diet most commonly seen in pasture raised fowl.

Fresh eggs sink in water.

Not sure how fresh those eggs are? Dropped in a bowl of water, a fresh egg will sink. As an egg gets older, the air pocket inside will grow, causing it to float.

Older eggs are better for hard-boiling.

Wait a couple of weeks before boiling fresh eggs. The membrane weakens as it ages, making the egg easier to peel.

What a chicken eats affects the flavor of the egg.

Chickens will eat just about anything. This is a handy way to use table scraps, but avoid strong flavors like onions or garlic, as the flavor will carry through to the eggs they produce.

Not sure if it’s raw or boiled? Spin it!

A hard boiled egg will spin evenly. Raw eggs wobble.

Eggs are good for nursing mothers.

Packed with protein, iron and 38 other vitamins and minerals, they help meet many of the increased nutritional requirements during breast feeding.

The egg came first.

[Research](http://www.livescience.com/3072-eggs-chickens-scientists.html) published in 2008 shows that dinosaurs were nesting and laying bird-like eggs well before chickens evolved from dinosaurs.

* [Terms of Use](http://www.scrippsnetworksinteractive.com/terms-of-use/)

* [Privacy Policy](http://www.scrippsnetworks.com/privacy.aspx)

* [AdChoices](http://info.evidon.com/pub_info/1212?v=1&nt=1&nw=false)

* [About](http://www.scrippsnetworksinteractive.com/)

* [Products](https://www.hgtv.com/design/decorating/design-101/HGTV-HOME-products-for-your-home)

* [Newsroom](http://newsroom.scrippsnetworksinteractive.com/)

* [Advertise With Us](http://www.scrippsnetworksdigital.com/)

* [Help](https://www.hgtv.com/about-us/questions-for-hgtv-com)

* [Contact Us](https://www.hgtv.com/about-us/contact-us)

* [Online Closed Captioning](https://corporate.discovery.com/online-closed-captioning/)

* [Discovery, Inc.](https://corporate.discovery.com/businesses-and-brands/)
* [See all Scripps Networks Digital](javascript:void(0);)

* © 2019 Scripps Networks, LLC. All rights reserved.