

Chicken Breeds

Chickens are some of the most versatile and beloved domesticated animals, serving as sources of food, companionship, and even pest control in many parts of the world. With a wide variety of breeds available, each possessing unique characteristics and traits, choosing the right type of chicken for your needs can be both exciting and challenging. In this guide, we'll delve into some of the most popular chicken breeds, along with their pros and cons.

1. Rhode Island Red

Pros:

- Excellent egg production, with hens laying large brown eggs consistently.
- Hardy and adaptable to various climates, making them suitable for both backyard and farm settings.
- Friendly and docile temperament, often getting along well with other flock members.

Cons:

- Can be relatively aggressive towards other chickens, especially if space is limited.
- May become broody, leading to a decrease in egg production during those periods.

2. Leghorn

Pros:

- Prolific egg layers, known for their ability to produce large quantities of white eggs.
- Active and alert birds, which can help in pest control efforts by foraging for insects.
- Low maintenance requirements, making them suitable for beginners or those with limited time for care.

Cons:

- Can be skittish and flighty, requiring adequate space and protection from predators.
- Not particularly cold-hardy, so additional measures may be needed in colder climates to ensure their well-being.

3. Plymouth Rock

Pros:

- Dual-purpose breed, valued for both meat and egg production.
- Gentle and easy to handle, making them suitable for families with children.
- Tolerant of confinement, but also enjoy free-ranging if given the opportunity.

Cons:

- Moderate egg production compared to some other breeds.
- May become overweight if not provided with sufficient space for exercise.

4. Sussex

Pros:

- Excellent foragers, capable of thriving in free-range environments.
- Good egg production of large brown eggs, making them valuable for small-scale egg production.
- Calm and friendly disposition, often integrating well into mixed flocks.

Cons:

- Susceptible to health issues such as Marek's disease and bumblefoot if not properly cared for.
- Require adequate space for ranging and may become restless if confined for long periods.

5. Silkies

Pros:

- Unique appearance with fluffy feathers and distinctive black skin.
- Gentle and docile nature, making them popular as pets and for children to handle.
- Broody tendencies, making them excellent mothers for hatching and raising chicks.

Cons:

- Not prolific egg layers, producing small cream-colored eggs intermittently.
- Vulnerable to extreme weather conditions due to their fluffy plumage.

6. Brahma

Pros:

- Large size makes them suitable for both meat and egg production.
- Cold-hardy birds, with thick feathers and a small comb that reduces the risk of frostbite.
- Gentle giants with calm and friendly personalities, making them popular choices for backyard flocks.

Cons:

- Slow to mature, both in terms of egg production and reaching market weight for meat.
- Require ample space and sturdy housing due to their size.

In conclusion, choosing the right chicken breed depends on your specific needs and preferences. Whether you're seeking prolific egg layers, meat production, or friendly companionship, there's a breed out there to suit your requirements. By considering the pros and cons of different breeds, you can make an informed decision that will lead to a successful and enjoyable chicken-keeping experience.

Common Chicken Diseases and Treatment

Which Way to Treat a Sick Chicken?

First thing's first—you need to understand that chickens are prey animals. Meaning, they can be a sick chicken and hurt long before ever showing symptoms of being so. This is why monthly (and even weekly) animal checks are important to avoid a sick chicken. Look over each and every chicken as often as possible for you on your homestead. Pay close attention for common chicken illnesses. For us, at one point, we had a lot of chickens. It wasn't possible to check them all over in one week. So we did monthly checks. Next, you'll need to figure out how you want to treat animals on your homestead—chemically or holistically? Or both, when it comes right down to it. We are not strictly “holistic” here. If holistic methods don't work, I certainly go for the chemical method, or cull. However, all of the methods in today's blog are about holistic treatment. I always try hard to use my herbs and essential oils first for chicken diseases and treatment. We are a working homestead. Therefore, sometimes it's better to cut our losses than throw \$50+ into a \$10-\$25 chicken. It just doesn't add up for us to do that. We certainly keep things on hand if something goes wrong, but for a single incident? Absolutely not. Culling is our choice when all else fails within reason. Chicken diseases and treatment are simple though, once you know what you're looking for. So let's get started.

Prevention of Chicken Illnesses Is Key

If you take nothing else away from this blog, please take away this. Prevention on your homestead is essential. Many common chicken illnesses and issues can be prevented or at least counteracted. So, how do you prevent illnesses in your chickens?

Give Your Chickens A Healthy Diet

Make sure they have all the nutrients they need. Skip the GMO feed if you can. Organic is certainly best, but not possible for some incomes. If you want, you can make your own chicken feed.

Add Supplements to Chicken Feed

This is a really ideal way to help prevent disease and illness in your flock—add supplements to your chicken feed. I highly suggest adding things such as dried/powdered garlic, Diatomaceous Earth (DE), Black Oil Sunflower Seeds (BOSS), Oregano, and Turmeric into their feed and diet as much as possible. You can learn all about why we add these, and more about herbs for chickens, in this blog post.

Add Apple Cider Vinegar to Your Chicken Waterer

Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) helps alkalize the body in any living being. It's also great for gut and crop health in chickens because it's filled with wonderful probiotics and has antifungal properties. A sick chicken will be your best friend if you give them ACV! I do not suggest adding ACV to water during the hot months, as it can actually cause them to overheat more in the summertime.

Chicken Herbs and Snacks

Growing your own chicken garden isn't always the easiest, but when you can set aside time to dry herbs (or order them online), and add it into their feed, you'll see your chickens' health improve dramatically. Herbs and snacks such as garlic, oregano, thyme, marigolds, dandelions, violets, chickweed, red raspberry leaf, elderberry (dried), and autumn olive berry are great, wild grown options for your flock. We also like to use astragalus in our chicken feed. Some of these things you can find right in your own backyard. Others you can forage for. And still, others, you can grow yourself or order large bags of online here. They are a great way to help with chicken diseases and treatment. Learn more about herbs and supplements for your chickens here.

Keep Essential Oils On Hand

Essential oils are a very quick alternative to harsh chemicals when you have a sick chicken. We've healed many a chicken strictly with Oregano and Melaleuca! You can find out more about EOs in my book, *The Homesteader's Natural Chicken Keeping Handbook*.

Make Sure Their Forage Area and Coop is Safe

Ultimately, some things happen because of unsafe living areas. Whether it's a predator attack, or a hen getting her leg caught in some contraption—do a check on your barn, coop, and foraging areas often. Rid these areas of any potential safety hazards for your flock and yourself.

Chicken Diseases and Treatment

Now that we have the prevention part of this equation down, let's get right down to the sick chicken—common chicken illnesses and treatment. You're probably reading this blog because you need help right here and now. You now know how to help prevent illness, but that doesn't help you right now if your chicken is ill or in pain. Here are some common diseases and the treatments for them.

Lice and Mites

We had our first run in with lice about 6 months into our chicken journey when we bought lice infested chickens from someone we thought we knew well, but in fact, were stuck with sick chickens. I made the mistake of treating them chemically, and almost ended up in the hospital myself. After their first treatment, I learned of a much better way to continue treating them (as they need to be treated for an entire month). Lice and mites transmit from other birds. However, if left long enough, can become an epidemic and kill your chickens by feeding on their blood supply. It takes awhile to get to that point, which is how we knew the chickens had lice before they arrived here (and none of my other flock had them, but had to be treated still). Should you find yourself with an anemic chicken, raw red meat in his/her diet is essential to get their iron levels back up. The safest and best treatment: This needs its own blog post, and lucky for you, I wrote one specifically for this. Go find out this amazing treatment here. I have gotten so much amazing feedback from it over the years. I know it won't disappoint you!

Naturally Treating Chicken Mites with Essential Oils and Garlic

I've always prided myself in keeping a healthy and clean flock. Sure, we've had a few run-ins with chickens that we've brought into the flock throughout our chicken keeping days (who hasn't?), but we came out with more knowledge once we actually walked through those issues *first-hand*. Our first misadventure was lice. We had bought several French Black Copper Marans that, unbeknownst to us at the time, had lice. We had no idea what we were doing back then (years ago), and we learned, very quickly, to look over future sets of birds that we bought.

Surpassing that, we've never had any issues with external parasites in our flock. Well, until the mite infestation of early 2018.

The Virginia weather has been so crazy this year, that I'm sure it played a role. The other issue is that our flock hasn't been free-ranging like they had been before, due to us having to re-grade and re-seed our backyard area. Certainly, we're remedying that by feeding them a mostly raw diet with feed scraps and veggies, but we're missing the point of the rotational grazing and free-ranging—it's not just about the diet. The biggest reason we free-range is to keep down on internal and external parasites. Because chickens are rotating or free-ranging, they are less likely to be consumed by parasites, in general, because their diet is so widely diverse, and they are dispersed across the property rather than sitting in one place all day long.

Unfortunately, with the current property projects, our chickens have been lacking in the free-ranging department.

Whatever the case may be, I walked outside one morning this winter to discover that our chickens had, at some point, become mite magnets. Northern Fowl Mites, to be exact.

Mites are nasty little things. They feed on the blood, dead skin cells, and feathers of your chickens. Chickens most commonly get them from migrating birds. Because our chicken coop sits directly under the wooded area of our property, this shouldn't have shocked me.

While there are natural preventative measures that you can take to help lessen the possibility of your chickens getting mites, sometimes, they simply don't work. It takes a perfect storm for chickens to get mites. Let's go over some ways to prevent them from getting mites, and then I want to share with you how we were able to naturally get rid of them, without any chemicals!

Ways to Naturally Prevent Mites

- **Dust Bathing Area.** Your chickens need to have a dust bathing area available to them *at all times*—yes, even if it's raining and snowing. This is their natural defense when external parasites arise, and the only way for them to naturally get rid of the parasites themselves. Make sure you have a bathing area that is either under-cover, or has a removable cover.
- **Add wood ash** to their dust bathing area, as it is a natural mite deterrent and kills the external parasites when it comes into contact with them. I prefer adding wood ash to my dust bathing area, versus Diatomaceous Earth (DE), as it has a higher efficacy than DE when it gets wet.
- **Brewer's Yeast or Cultured Dried Yeast in their feed.** While this can be hit or miss, adding brewer's yeast or cultured dried yeast to their feed can help deter mites, but it's not always 100% effective if other factors are at play. You could also try adding garlic to their feed, but they'd have to consume a lot per chicken for the efficacy to be high enough that not a single chicken had a mite issue.

We could talk about adding herbs to the coop to deter mites, but the plain fact is, herbs in the chicken coop won't deter mites. Mites are tiny parasites that hide in crevasses and bedding, so while they might not hang out in nesting boxes due to nesting box herbs, they will most certainly be hanging out on the chicken roost and ready for a feast when your chickens roost at night.

While nesting box herbs can most certainly help, mites can just bury deeper into feathers and onto skin to avoid nesting box herbs.

Mites can also hide in feed and other nutrient dense area that have waste or dust, if there's a warm-blooded host around. So make sure you check throughout your feed bins regularly.

Natural Mite Treatment

So you've tried all of the natural preventatives, which are very few but easy to maintain, but you still have mites. I found myself in this same exact situation. While at first I looked at the sky and cursed this small parasitic filth, I took it as an opportunity to show you that mites really can be treated naturally and without chemicals. Perfect timing for my chicken book that's coming out Spring 2019! More on that another day.

Let me show you how to get rid of chicken mites, naturally!

1. **Clean the Coop Thoroughly.** Take out *all* of the bedding, burn it. Do not compost it. Simply toss it out, burn it, and be done with it. Sweep out the coop to ensure you got most, or all, of the little nasties. I did not add bedding back into the coop after cleaning (step 2), just the nesting boxes.
2. **Treat the Coop.** Spray down your coop with **eucalyptus, tea tree, lavender, peppermint, basil, and cinnamon bark essential oils.** All of these essential oils have been proven to have anti-parasitic effects when used topically. You can make this spray by placing 45 drops of each oil into a 16 oz. glass water bottle. Add your essential oils (*eucalyptus and tea tree are important!*). Fill the bottle up most of the way with water, then top off with about 1-2 tbsp of witch hazel, rubbing alcohol, or white vinegar. Spray down your entire coop, top to bottom, with this solution, concentrating heavily on dark areas and cracks in the roost and nesting boxes. After it dries, you can add straw back to your nesting boxes, but I would leave the coop floor bare and scoop out poop each day. Once the roosts are dry, dust them down with **Diatomaceous Earth.** Continue to dust the roosts with DE a couple of times each week.
3. **Dust Chickens with Wood Ash.** The same wood ash that works wonders in the dust bathing area also works wonders with manually dusting your chickens. Take wood ash and dust each chicken individually, making a point to try and get it to touch the chicken's skin. Concentrate on the neck, top of the tail where their oil gland is, the vent, and under the wings.
4. **Treat the Chickens.** In a study done at Clemson University, mite infestations were successfully dealt with using the topical

application of garlic. Use the below recipe once a day for two weeks, then twice a week for two weeks, to rid your chickens of mites. You can continue to dust your chickens with wood ash once a week, but it may not be necessary.



Chicken Mite Treatment Spray

20 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed (or 1 oz garlic extract)

45 drops eucalyptus essential oil*

30 drops lavender essential oil*

30 drops peppermint essential oil*

20 drops cinnamon bark essential oil*

20 drops melissa essential oil*

2 tbs White Vinegar (unless using garlic extract)

Water

Method:

1. In a 16 oz. glass spray bottle, combine garlic (or extract) and essential oils. If using smashed garlic, allow it to sit for several hours before using.
2. If using garlic extract, do not use white vinegar. Simply fill the rest of the bottle up with water 3/4 of the way full. If using smashed garlic, add vinegar.
3. Shake the bottle well before each spray. Spray directly on the skin of the chicken, concentrating only on the neck, the vent area, and the top of the tail where the oil gland is. I also spray their feet and the base of the roosting bar so that when they lay back down on their feet and roost, the mixture gets onto their bellies. Do this treatment at night after they've gone to roost.
4. Continue this treatment for two weeks, then twice a week for two weeks, to rid your chickens of mites. You can continue to dust your chickens with wood ash once a week, but it may not be necessary.

We were able to successfully rid our chickens of mites with essential oils and garlic! I hope that this method helps you as well. More than likely you've come across this blog because you're currently having this issue, or what to know what to do if you have this issue. I'm here to tell you that it works!

Scaly Leg Mites

Scaly leg mites are very similar in transmittal as lice and mites for chickens. However, I have read some pretty crazy "treatments" online for it. Someone even suggested you douse the legs in gasoline or kerosene. Please, do not do that. The safest and best treatment: Soak your chickens legs in a warm water bath with dish liquid. Scrub their legs with a toothbrush to help loosen any dying scales. Dry and slather both legs and feet with a thick oil such as coconut oil, neem oil, or olive oil. This will help smother the mites and allow for quicker growth of new scales. Add this oil to the legs of the chickens for at least 4 weeks, once or twice a week. Offering the same DE and wood ash dust bath to your chickens is also essential. You'll also need to clean out the entire coop, dust with DE (without the chickens inside the coop) and make sure you've gotten all of the old bedding out. Don't forget to dust the roosts as well!

Coccidiosis

Cocci can be a vicious parasite in your flock's digestive tract. A sick chicken with cocci can be fatal. While it mostly attacks younger digestive tracts, such as with chicks, it can also attack your adult flock as well. This would cause diarrhea, unusual

feces, blood in feces, and even death if left long enough. The safest and best treatment: Kocci free is a very effective treatment. We use many of the Vibactra plus products on our homestead. They are an incredible source for herbal remedies. In fact, you can use Kocci free as a preventative as well once a month. Simply add it to their water.

Chicken Respiratory Illnesses

Many new chicken owners freak out when they notice their chickens sneezing or wheezing. But it's not always the "worst". No, chickens do not get "colds", however, their respiratory tracts are extremely sensitive. A little more dust than normal in the coop can cause sneezing and wheezing. The safest and best treatment: Clean the coop out and lay down a less dusty bedding, especially in the summer months. We prefer cardboard bedding in the summer months. Make sure you air out your coop before putting in new bedding, and make sure your coop has good ventilation so that dust can escape easily. Many times, respiratory issues arise because of dust, too much ammonia in the coop, or pollen. This is one of the most common chicken illnesses in the book! So make sure you know what you're looking for.

Mycoplasma Gallisepticum and Mycoplasma Synoviae Infection (MG/MS)

Mycoplasma is a completely different issue that we really need to talk about in the chicken world. We experienced what I believe was a case of MG here the very first month we started with chickens. The chicken, thank goodness, was on our property for less than 48 hours and was quarantined (and immediately culled), but it was scary, to say the least. Number one — ALWAYS QUARANTINE NEW CHICKENS. We learned our lesson and are thankful we did. MG and MS are respiratory bacteria that can seriously sicken and kill your entire flock. It is extremely contagious, and can even be spread by clothing and shoes. Many chicken experts will tell you that MG and MS are not curable, but I have to respectfully disagree. If preventatives are used, and if caught in time at the first symptoms, I absolutely believe that MG and MS can be cured. It is, after all, simply a bacteria. Chicken diseases and treatments can be simple or complicated. I'm going to try to make this as simple as possible. Symptoms of MG/MS: Wheezing, gasping for air, puffy face and swollen eyes, sneezing, sinus drainage, swollen joints, lethargy. The safest and best treatment: You'll need to be aggressive with this one. Oregano (antibiotic) in their feed and water at all times during treatment until symptoms have completely passed for ALL chickens. Add turmeric (immune support and anti-inflammatory) and garlic (antibacterial) to their feed as well. Separate any infected birds as much as possible, but treat ALL birds the same. Chickens can have MG/MS and not show symptoms until stressed or weak, which is what happened to us when we brought in a new chicken. Within 24 hours, she was literally on her death bed when she was fine the day we bought her. Your chickens will need to be treated until ALL symptoms are gone. You should also not visit other farms unless you plan to change your clothing when you get there. And do NOT sell chickens or hatching eggs from your property for at least 4 weeks after symptoms are gone.

Infectious Coryza

I don't have any experience with IC, but I've read enough, and experienced enough through others, to know that IC is extremely detrimental to any flock. Once contracted, it is extremely hard to get rid of. And can live in your soil for awhile. The

fatality rate is extremely high and depressing even with treatment. I have no advice to offer you on IC except that you can treat the same way you would treat MG/MS, however, if it spreads to your entire flock viciously, you may very well consider culling and starting all over again after a 4 week waiting period.

Sour Crop

Sour Crop is probably one of the most common issues on a homestead when it comes to chickens. At least, it seems to be. We've actually never had the issue here, but have had friends with sour crop. Sour crop happens when chickens ingest something that is too big for them to pass through the crop. It can also be fungal, as things can begin to ferment in the crop and cause more issues if not passed properly. The safest and best treatment: Giving your chicken ACV and olive oil in the crop will help tremendously. ACV has antifungal properties, and therefore can help tone down that yeastiness in the crop. You can add oil to your chicken's crop and massage her crop, holding her upside down, to help expel anything that may be lodged or compacted.

Bumble Foot

Bumble foot is another very common issue on the homestead. This happens when your chicken has stepped on something, such as a thorn or has gotten a cut on their foot. The thorn or cut then becomes infected, causing a sore type lesion to pop up on the bottom of their foot or in between toes. It can affect their walking, and if left long enough, the infection can spread to their entire body. The safest and best treatment: You can pick the scab off of the bottom of the foot and expel any infection that way, and also release the core of the issue (if it's something lodged inside the foot). Or you can wrap the foot with a bandage soaked in tea tree and oregano essential oils. This has proven to be extremely successful for us, as the tea tree oil is antiseptic, and the oregano oil is a natural fighter of infection. You'll need to do this, daily (direct skin contact with a swab soak in the oil under the bandage) for at least a week or until symptoms begin to subside. This also allows your chicken to walk better with the bandage and extra padding so that it can heal quicker. When all else fails, you may choose to take a chemical route. However, we have not had to do that in over two years with preventative methods and herbal treatments. Common chicken illnesses are a dime a dozen, but chicken diseases and treatment don't have to be dramatic or complicated. Go with your gut, because most of the time it never steers you wrong. And remember that if you lose a chicken, you're not a bad chicken keeper or homesteader. Sometimes, these things just happen and they are out of our control. More than anything remember, prevention is key!

Chick Care

Chicken

Seven Things to Know When Caring for Baby Chicks

Did you know that poultry is Arkansas' leading agricultural industry? It includes broilers, turkeys, and chicken eggs.

There has been an increase in the hobby of keeping small poultry flocks the past few years. Youth poultry programs have also gained in popularity. Let's look at some things you need to know if you have an interest in raising your own baby chicks.

What do I need to know about caring for baby chicks?

1. Be prepared before the chicks arrive.

Make sure you have a brooder area with a heat source prepared before chicks arrive. A brooder area is a contained area that provides a warm and safe environment for raising chicks. Preparing this area 24 hours prior to chick arrival is best. Poultry brooders are available for purchase, or you can build your own brooder/brooder area. The brooder area is normally set up inside a barn, garage, or some type of enclosed building.

2. Make sure you have the proper space.

3.

Try to provide .5 square foot per chick at the beginning. Once the birds are fully mature, you will need between 2.5 to 3 square foot per bird if they are going to be confined and up to 10 square foot or more of outside space if ranging. Chickens are outside animals. They are not house pets. Some cities will allow chickens, and other cities may not. Contact your city government to find out if your town allows chickens to be housed inside city limits.

4. Choose the appropriate bedding or litter.

Large pine shavings make good bedding or litter for baby chicks. Do not use small shavings or sawdust. Baby chicks learning to eat might eat the small shavings or sawdust, possibly causing an increase in mortality. Rice hulls, straw, or hay also make good bedding. Do not use sand or cedar shavings as it is not safe for the chicks. You need to cover the entire brooder area with the bedding of your choice at approximately 1 to 3 inches deep. On concrete floors use 3 to 5 inches of bedding. Turning the bedding/litter once per week will help it last longer. Pine shavings used for poultry bedding can be purchased at your local farm stores.

5. Provide adequate heat for the chicks.

A drop light with a reflector shield is a good source of heat. Heat lamp bulbs

that are 250 watts are ideal and will keep the birds comfortable. Red or white bulbs are available, and both are fine to use. You should hang the reflector light from something secure, so it does not come loose and drop down. It could cause a fire or injure or kill the bird. The wattage of the bulb you are using will determine how high you will hang the light.

Place a thermometer at floor level to help ensure you have the proper temperature for the chicks, which should be around 95 degrees Fahrenheit for the first week. The chicks will need enough space to move near the heat source or to walk away if too hot. The bottom of the bulb should be about 24 to 30 inches above the bedding.

6. The most important nutrient is water.

--Water should be at room temperature to prevent chicks from getting chilled while drinking.

--You should always have clean water available to the chicks.

--Upon the chicks' arrival, be sure the water is at room temperature.

--Dip the beak of the chick in the water as you place them into the brooding area. The chicks will be thirsty when you get them.

Often baby chick mortality is caused because the chick doesn't start to eat or drink. Never let your chicks run out of water. Occasionally chicks will get into the water, get wet and chilled. This can be prevented by using shallow water dispensers or placing marbles/tank rocks into the water foundation base to prevent chicks from submerging in the water.

7. Know how and what to feed your chicks.

Your feed trough should be low enough the chicks can see and reach the feed, even an open tray they can stand in is a good way to get them going. Start your birds on chick starter, turkey starter or gamebird starter feed. The high protein diet is best suited if you are wanting to develop a bird at its greatest potential. You don't need to add grit because the chick starter and grower feeds are formulated for what the chicks need to digest their food. Avoid feeding a scratch diet until the birds are fully matured. Chicks should stay on a starter or grower ration until they are 4 ½ to 5 months of age. Poultry feed can be purchased at your local farm stores.

Bringing home your baby chicks is an exciting milestone in raising backyard chickens. The three key essentials for raising strong baby chicks: Warm, water and feed. Start chicks strong by providing a complete chick starter feed from day 1 through week 18.

For those of us welcoming new chicks, how can we give them a solid start?

To best transition chicks into a flock, provide comfort, care and complete nutrition from day one. A chick never gets over a bad start.

The actions we take before chicks arrive and the care we provide in the first few days can help set-up our chicks to be happy and healthy long-term.

Before baby chicks arrive: Set up the brooder

Set up your brooder about 48 hours before your chicks arrive. This allows time for bedding and equipment to dry and the temperature to set.

Equipment for day one includes:

- **Brooder:** The brooder is the first home of new chicks. Be sure it is comfortable, warm and draft-free with at least 3 to 4 square feet per chick. The area should be circular and expandable.
- **Heat lamp:** Assemble a heat lamp in the center of the brooder for bird warmth. Hang the heat lamp about 20 inches above the litter, with 2.5 to 3 feet between the lamp and the guard walls. The temperature under the heat lamp, or comfort zone, should be 95 degrees Fahrenheit and adequate room in the brooder should be available for the chicks to get out from under the heater if they get too hot. After week one, gradually reduce heat by 5 degrees Fahrenheit each week until reaching a minimum of 55 degrees.
- **Bedding:** Add an absorbant wood shavings bedding to the floor of the brooder. Place bedding 3 to 4 inches deep to keep the area dry and odor free. Remove wet bedding daily, especially around waterers. Do not use cedar shavings or other types of shavings that have a strong odor because the odor could affect the long term health of the bird.
- **Lights:** Provide 18 – 22 hours of light for the first week. Then reduce light to 16 hours through the growing period or to the amount of light they will receive when they are 20 weeks of age. The amount of light intensity required would be provided by a 40 watt bulb for each 100 square feet (10' x 10') of floor space.
- **Feeders:** Offer 4 linear inches of feeder space for each bird. Clean egg cartons filled with feed make excellent and easily accessible feeders for young chicks. Provide low-lying feeders, or trough feeders, for after the transition.
- **Waterers:** For every 25 chicks, fill two 1-quart waterers with room temperature water and place them in the brooder. To help water stay at room temperature, place the waterers in the

brooder, outside the comfort zone (do not position underneath the heat lamp), 24 hours prior to the chicks' arrival.

Introduce baby chicks to water

Once chicks arrive, introduce them to the brooding area. Water, at room temperature, should be available, but wait a couple hours to introduce feed.

This gives chicks a couple hours to drink and rehydrate before they start eating, fresh, quality water is essential for healthy chicks. Dip the beaks of several chicks into the water to help them locate it. These chicks will then teach the rest of the group to drink. Monitor the group to ensure all chicks are drinking within the first couple hours.

Teach baby chicks to eat

After chicks have had a chance to rehydrate, provide the nutrients they need through a complete chick starter feed.

Provide a chick starter feed with at least 18 percent protein to help support the extra energy needed for early growth. The feed should also include amino acids for chick development; prebiotics, probiotics and yeast for immune health; and vitamins and minerals to support bone health.

First, teach the chicks to eat by placing feed on clean egg flats, shallow pans or simple squares of paper. On day 2, add proper feeders to the pens. Once chicks have learned to eat from the feeders, remove the papers, pans or egg flats.

Adjust feed as baby chicks develop

To keep feed fresh: Empty, clean and refill waterers and feeders daily. Also, raise the height of feeders and waterers so they are level with the birds' backs as chicks grow.

As chicks mature, their nutritional needs change. At about 18 weeks old, adjust the feed provided to meet the birds' evolving nutrition needs.

Transition layer chicks onto a higher-calcium complete feed when they begin laying eggs at age 18 to 20 weeks. For meat birds and

mixed flocks, choose a complete feed with about 20 percent protein and feed this diet from day one through adulthood.

The 4 Chicken Developmental Stages

Raising backyard chickens can be a beneficial and captivating hobby. Chickens can provide eggs and their manure stands as a potent source of organic fertilizer. These fascinating birds can also create hours of entertainment for the family.

When raising backyard chickens, understanding their life stages can be empowering. It can aid in providing the optimal food, shelter, and care they need at each specific stage. Dive deeper into the world of chickens and become a chicken connoisseur with this overview of the four stages of the chicken life cycle.

Incubation and Hatching

The chick begins its embryonic development even before the hen lays the egg. And once the egg is laid, the development pauses until favorable conditions are met, either under a broody hen or in a controlled incubator.

Once favorable conditions are met, here is a rundown of what happens:

Incubation Period	Development Milestones
First day	The first resemblance of a chick embryo develops, beginning with the vertebral column, head, and eye.
Second day	Heart and ears begin to form.
Third day	Nose, legs, and wings start to show.
Fifth day	Embryo is differentiated by sex as it forms its reproductive organs.
Sixth to the Tenth day	Beak, claws, feathers, and scales begin to form.

Fourteenth day	Embryo gets into position to break out of the shell
Twentieth day	Embryo occupies almost the entire space within the egg as it is primed to hatch.
Twenty-first day	The egg hatches.

During the incubation stage, the baby chick absorbs vital nutrients from the eggshell. This stage culminates as the chick pecks its way out to the world and hatches.

<p>Incubation Tip: To optimize chick development in an incubator, maintain a consistent temperature and humidity level.</p>

Baby Chicks

After hatching, baby chicks appear drenched and feeble. But they rapidly become lively. Baby chick care will depend on whether the mother hen is around or not.

If the mother hen is around, she takes charge. Baby chick care will need minimal human intervention. Providing a secure nesting space and starter feed crumbs will suffice.

But for those without the mother hen's care and protection, it's more complicated. Baby chicks require diligent care, requiring regulated temperatures starting at 95°F during the first week of their lives. They are also susceptible to diseases like coccidiosis because they are still developing their immune health.

This is why a brooder is essential for those without a mother hen. A brooder is a home for newly hatched eggs. Ensuring a dry environment with adequate ventilation and fresh bedding promotes the baby chicks' immune health and keeps diseases at bay. Such is a chick's life.

Here are the ideal brooder temperature ranges for your chicks to ensure their optimal development:

Chick Age	Brooding Temperature
0 to 1 week	93° to 95°F
1 to 2 weeks	88° to 90°F
2 to 3 weeks	83° to 85°F
3 to 4 weeks	78° to 80°F
4 to 5 weeks	75°F
5 to 6 weeks	70°F
6 weeks and above	50° to 70°F

Soon, the baby chicks start shedding their soft down and sprouting new primary feathers. Introduce a perch in their brooder and incorporate a chick grit in their feed to ensure their healthy growth. It's also vital to continue providing amino acids, key vitamins, and proteins for their optimal development.

Pullets

Pullets are adolescents that span from the fifth to the eighteenth week of the chicken life cycle. It's important to keep these young chickens on starter feed to ensure they are getting adequate protein. But be wary of feeding them too much calcium as it can hamper their growth.

Different poultry types require different diets and nutrients. To give you an idea of pullet age and diet type requirements, here's an example for Leghorn-type crosses:

Age	Diet Type
0 to 6 weeks	Starter
6 to 14 weeks	Grower
14 to 20 weeks	Developer

There will be visible growth changes in the pullets as they age, showcasing new primary feathers. Their lanky legs and disproportionate bodies are typical of this age.

If the breeder has a group of pullets, the pecking order becomes evident. It's wise to introduce the pullets to the larger flock once they achieve two-thirds of the adult size to avoid redundancy in the dominance hierarchy. Monitor the flock to prevent excessive bullying.

If there are adolescent males or cockerels, early introduction is preferable, especially if other roosters are present.

Action: Create a separate integration zone in the coop for the pullets. This allows pullets and adult chickens to see and interact with each other without physical contact. This reduces the risk of injury as they get to know each other.

Adult Hens and Egg Laying

A baby chick hatching from its egg will generally take eighteen weeks to become an adult. This stage in the chicken life cycle calls for a switch to standard feed or layer feed, beneficial for bone health and egg laying.

The first year of adulthood is relatively consistent. The hens will be prolific egg layers until about 18 months. After this, laying hens undergo molting. This involves the shedding and regrowth of their feathers, replenishing their nutrient reserves.

As laying hens age, their vitality and egg production diminish. Elderly chickens often face health challenges like arthritis. If you choose to keep them as pets, they can still be delightful companions and serve as pest controllers in your garden.

Here are some tips for taking care of older chickens:

- Lower the height of their perch to help with mobility problems
- Put food and water in more accessible places to ensure good health
- Clip their nails if their nails are no longer worn down by foraging and scratching
- Find a vet who specializes in poultry

The 4 Stages of Chicken Development

There are four chicken growth stages: incubation and hatching, baby chicks, pullets, and adult hens. Each stage has its own wonders and challenges.

Understanding the journey from an egg to a mature hen offers an enriching experience. It enriches human lives with the wonders of nature and helps breeders ensure the well-being of their feathery friends.

Here at Stromberg's Chickens, we have everything you need for each chicken growth stage, from high-quality incubators for your chicken eggs to nutrient-rich feeds for your mature chickens.

With this insight into the chicken developmental stages, your flock is poised to flourish in the years ahead. Reach out to us for all your poultry needs.

Which Chicken Breed Is Right For You?

With more than 400 chicken breeds to choose from deciding on the right breed for your needs can be a challenge.

When it comes to picking the right chicken breed you must first consider how their characteristics match your needs and situation.

Are you after a family pet? Did you want to keep chickens for their egg production value or to farm them for their meat?

Have you considered the cost of feeding them? Will they thrive in your local climate? You also need to think about how much space they'll need.

If you can decide which of these are most important to you, it will simplify the process of choosing the right chicken breed for you.

Each breed has a category list noting their key characteristics. Where the plumage colour is listed this generally represents only a very small sample of the possible colours for that breed.

Many of the large breeds have bantam versions as well if size is important.

Best Choice for Meat

The following breeds are noted for the quality of their meat: Dorking, Croad Langshan, Faverolles, Barnevelder, Australian Langshan, Plymouth Rock, Delaware, Brahma, Catalana.

Family and Child Friendly

Popular chicken breeds for keeping as pets include: Ameraucana, Silkie, ISA Brown, Pekin, Frizzle and the Australorp, Brahma, Booted Bantam, Houdan.

Cheap to Feed

The following breeds are very economical to feed: Jungle Fowl, Silkie, Rosecomb, Frizzle, Modern Game, Japanese, Belgian Bantams, Sultan, Sebright.

Top Egg Layers

Popular chicken breeds most suited for laying eggs include: ISA Brown, Leghorn, Australian Langshan, Rhode Island Red, Australorp, Barter Black, Barter Brown and Barter white, Wyandotte, Orpington, Belgian bearded d'Uccle, Cinnamon Queen, Catalana, Sussex, Minorca.

Australian Breeds

Australorps, Barter Black, Barter Brown and Barter white, Australian Langshan, Australian Game, Australian Pit Game.

Rare

Ameraucana, Houdan, Booted bantam, Buff laced Polish, Dorking, Japanese bantam, Norfolk grey.

Ancona Chickens

Are most recognisable by its black feathers with a beetle green sheen.

Ancona

Ancona chickens make a great backyard pet as they are hardy and easy to care for. They are a dual-purpose breed, meaning they can be used for both eggs and meat.

They are a rare breed, originating in Ancona, Italy. The Ancona chicken is most recognisable by its black feathers with a beetle green sheen. Each black feather has a small white tip on the end.

Ameraucana Chickens

They have dark grey feathers with small black sections on their wings and tail

Ameraucana

The Ameraucana chicken is a unique and rare breed. They are currently growing in popularity in both Australia and the USA.

Ameraucanas are known for their light blue eggs. However, there is more to this breed than just blue egg laying. Backyard chicken owners are falling in love with their fluffy face feathers and gentle personality.

Australian Game

Australian Game Image from backyardpoultry.com

The Australian Game (Colonial Game) is a large (up to 4.5 kg for the hen) show and meat breed. It does exist as a bantam version too. Long legs and muscular appearance hint at their fighting pit origins.

Category: large, meat, Australian

Australorp Chickens

Australorps are an egg-laying breed of chicken that is prized for its efficiency

Australorps

Australorps are excellent egg producers. They average around 250 to 300 large light brown eggs a year and in 1922, six hens laid 1,857 eggs over 365 days for the new world record!

Australorp chickens live quiet lives with adults and children alike – they can cope well even through cold winter weather too.

The hen is about 3 pounds when fully grown into adulthood so it's an ideal size as far as roasting goes!

Australian Langshan

Australian Langshan Image from backyardpoultry.com

A popular cross-breed which was developed in Australia and are well suited to our harsh climate. The Australian Langshan comes in both bantam and standard size.

They are often kept for exhibiting or egg laying and they are considered a good “all rounder”. They are known to be quite friendly and docile.

Category: large, good egg producers, family pet

Australian Pit Game

Australian Pit Game Image from backyardpoultry.com

The Australian Pit Game is a large very athletic looking bird. The meat is said to be reasonably good but they are bred mostly for show purposes.

They are alert and very agile birds and not at all amenable as family pets. A bantam version is available.

Category: large, meat, black plumage, Australian

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Bantam Chickens

Bantam chickens produce a good number of rich, fine-tasting eggs.

Bantam Chickens

Bantam chickens in your backyard; it's an idea that's rapidly gaining in popularity.

And what's not to love when they make wonderful pets and deliver eggs fresh to your door every day as well as provide excellent free garden manure?

Bantams are small chickens. Some varieties have been bred to produce miniature versions but other bantam breeds only exist in the small size.

Barnevelder Chickens

They tend to be quiet and shy

Barnevelder

The Barnevelder is a large chicken that produces good meat and lots of eggs. Barnevelders tend to be shy and quiet and are especially good with children.

The female sports a striking feather coloration. Barnevelders are reasonably hardy and will tolerate colder conditions. Category: large, meat, black or white plumage, good egg producer (230 chocolate brown eggs), family pet

Barter Black

Barter Black Image from backyardpoultry.com

The Barter Black originates from an Australorp and Rhode Island Red cross.

A Barter Black is a good layer (1 light brown egg per day) with a friendly, calm temperament and makes a great pet.

Category: large, black plumage, excellent egg producer, family pet, Australian

Barter Brown

Barter Brown Image from backyardpoultry.com

The Barter Brown originates from a Rhode Island Red and a White Leghorn cross.

A Barter Brown chicken is economical, as they do not need much feed and provide plenty of eggs.

They are a very friendly, quiet and calm bird that makes for a great pet.

Category: large, brown plumage, excellent egg producer, family pet, Australian

Barter White

Barter White Image from backyardpoultry.com

The Barter White originates from a Pure White Leghorn rooster and Rhode Island Red cross. This economical chicken eats less than other breeds and still lays plenty of eggs.

With its calm, friendly nature it makes a great family pet.

Category: large, white plumage, excellent egg producer, family pet, Australian

Belgian Bearded d'Uccle

Belgian Bearded d'Uccle Image from backyardpoultry.com

The Belgian Bearded d'Uccle are true bantams but what they lack in size they make up for with prolific egg production, and larger than life personality.

Long leg feathers and a beard give this chicken a very exotic appearance. They are hardy in hot climates but don't like excessive cold. They are sweet natured and calm.

Category: small, black or white plumage, excellent egg producer (200—250 tinted eggs)

Booted Bantam

Booted Bantam Image from backyardpoultry.com

Booted Bantams (true bantam, also known as Sabelpoot in the Netherlands) are small birds distinguished by the large feathers on their feet. Booted Bantams lay around 160 small tinted eggs each year. Their friendly nature makes them a good pet for children. The hen weighs around 750g.

Category: Small, rare, black or white plumage, small tinted eggs, family pets

Brahma Chickens

these chickens make excellent family pets that love attention

Brahma

Brahma are one of the largest chicken breeds in the world. These feathery friends weigh 4 kgs and come in bantam sizes too!

They're sweet, friendly, easy to handle – making them great pets for families with children or other animals.

Brahma also lay well during winter months; producing eggs that can be a much-needed supplement when your family is craving fresh egg yolks over those store bought varieties from grocery stores who may have spent weeks on end sitting around waiting to get fresh stock!

Buff Laced Polish

Buff Laced Polish Image from backyardpoultry.com

Buff Laced Polish are an unusual looking chicken with a crazy bouffant hairstyle. Egg production can be unreliable but their richly coloured appearance, crazy antics, and gentle personality make them a great choice for pets.

Category: small, relatively rare, reasonable egg production (120 small white eggs each year), good family pets

Catalana

Catalana Image from backyardpoultry.com

Catalanas produce lots of eggs, are good for meat production, and love the heat. They do best with lots of free ranging space and tend to be lively and flighty but they don't cope with cold conditions. They are not very friendly so do not make great pets.

Category: meat, brown plumage, good egg producers

Cinnamon Queen

Cinnamon Queen Image from backyardpoultry.com

Cinnamon Queen are egg laying machines—up to 300 eggs per year. They will also start laying earlier than most other breeds and are very hardy birds.

They are noted for their docile and sweet nature. You can tell the sex of young chicks by their colour; young males are white, females are reddish brown.

Category: top egg producers (large brown eggs), white plumage, good family pets

Cochin Chickens

Cochins are naturally a laid back and gentle chicken breed. Even the roosters are easy going in comparison to other breeds.

Cochin Chicken

The Cochin chicken makes a great family pet. Sometimes referred to as a 'lap chicken', they are easy to handle and happy to be held. This makes them suitable for families with children.

Cochins are most recognisable by their fluffy, feathered toes which make them look bigger than they are.

Despite not laying many eggs, Cochin chickens are growing in popularity with backyard chicken keepers. People can't help but fall in love with their gentle personalities and big, fluffy bodies.

Croad Langshan

Croad Langshan Image from backyardpoultry.com

Croad Langshans (also known as Langshan) are large-bodied birds. They lay up to 240 pinkish-brown eggs a year. They are easily tamed and need to be kept in dry, sheltered conditions.

A bantam version is available. Their graceful U-shaped appearance makes them popular as show birds.

Category: large, black or white plumage, egg production

Delaware

Delaware Image from [pinterest.com](#)

Delaware (formerly known as Indian Rivers) gained fame as meat birds with clean tasting white meat. The hens, weighing around 3kg, lay 150 or more dark brown eggs each year. They cope well with both heat and cold and their calm, quiet, friendly personalities make them ideal as a backyard pet. Delaware plumage tends to be mostly white.

Category: large, white meat, white plumage, dark brown eggs, good family pets

Dorking

Dorking Image from [backyardpoultry.com](#)

The Dorking, with its fine tender white meat is widely regarded as one of the finest tasting chickens available. However, it has become quite rare thanks to its slow growth rate.

Dorking hens are also reasonable layers producing around 140 large white eggs. Dorkings are reasonably calm and tolerant but they do have a tendency to brood.

Dorking hens will weigh between 3.6 and 5kg but bantam versions are available.

Category: rare, large, meat, white plumage, white eggs

Easter Egger

Easter Egger Image from backyardpoultry.com

Easter Eggers are renowned for their ability to lay eggs in a rainbow of colours including blue, green brown and pink. Each hen will lay eggs of only one colour during its life.

Friendly, calm, easily-handled, and docile are their typical personality traits. They tolerate all climates well.

Category: large, meat, good egg layer (medium sized, various colours), good family pets

Faverolles

Faverolles Image from backyardpoultry.com

Faverolles are sweet, gentle, calm yet curious birds. They are the perfect chicken for a family pet. They also happen to produce excellent flavoured meat and average 170 medium sized eggs each year. They cope well with cold weather. A bantam version exists.

Category: large, meat, egg production (cream or salmon coloured), family pet

Frizzle Chicken Breed

The Frizzle is a friendly bird and an average layer which doesn't consume much feed

Frizzle

Frizzle's were selectively bred for exhibition; however their curled, fragile feathers aren't suited for rainy or cold weather. A bantam version exists.

Their appearance makes them an interesting addition to any backyard flock. They are friendly and easy to handle, making them a great pet.

Category: large or small, black or white plumage

Houdan

Houdan Image from backyardpoultry.com

Houdan are moderately large chickens with an excellent tender white flesh. Houdan are moderately prolific egg layers; 180—240 white eggs each year. The v shaped comb and head feathers make for a very distinctive appearance.

Houdan cope well with warm climates and like to forage for their food. Houdan make great family pets, as they are friendly, docile, and are happy being handled if trained to it from a young age.

Category: rare, meat, mottled black or white plumage, top egg layers (white eggs), good family pets

Hy-Line Brown

Hy-Line Brown Image from Talking Hens

Hy-Line Brown Chickens are popular egg layers, and are often used for commercial egg-laying.

They also make great pets as they are placid and friendly, and economical, having been cited as having the “Best feed to egg efficiency of all layer hens” on the website talkinghens.com.

Category: large, brown plumage, excellent egg producer (320 brown eggs per year), family pet

ISA Brown Chickens

ISA Brown chickens have a rectangular shaped body that is very lean. They have a short, straight tail that sits upright.

ISA Brown

ISA Brown from backyardpoultry.com

ISA Brown chicken breeds are one of the most popular chicken breeds found in backyards Australia-wide.

They are a hybrid chicken, and are said to produce up to 300 eggs per hen in its first year of laying (they typically lay for 2 years).

ISA Browns' produce eggs daily, have a good temperament, are sociable and make great pets.

Category: large (up to 5kg), exceptional egg producers (brown), family pets

Japanese Bantam

Japanese Bantam Image from backyardpoultry.com

Japanese Bantams, with their exquisitely elegant appearance, are mostly ornamental. They lay around 160 white or brown eggs annually. At 450g, the hens are small and true bantams.

They are not hardy; they don't cope with cold weather and may need to live indoors. However, they are very friendly.

Category: small, rare, black or white plumage, eggs

Jungle Fowl

Jungle Fowl Image from Public Domain

Originally a wild bird, the Jungle Fowl produces eggs seasonally. Jungle fowl were probably the first chickens to be domesticated more than 7000 years

ago. It is a very wary and alert bird who eats very little. Jungle fowl do best with lots of space.

Category: small

Leghorn Chickens

Leghorns are popular world-wide for laying white eggs

Leghorn

Leghorn Image from backyardpoultry.com

Thought to have originated from Italy, Leghorns are popular world-wide for laying white eggs. They lay an average of 280 per year and have been known on occasion to even reach 320 in a year.

Leghorn chickens are nervous, flighty and highly active. The chickens will be quite happy in all weathers coping well with both heat and cold but they are not a great choice for a family pet, as they tend to be unfriendly.

Category: small, white plumage, top egg layer (large white)

Minorca

Minorca Image from pinterest.com

Minorca (old names include; Red faced Spanish, Moorish fowl) produce 200 or more very large white eggs each year. They need lots of space and don't make good pets. The red wattles against the black plumage give them a very distinctive appearance.

Category: large, black plumage, egg production

New Hampshire Red

New Hampshire Red Image from backyardpoultry.com

New Hampshire Red are great all-round meat, egg producer, and family pet type of chickens. They are very tame, calm, and tolerant. They don't fly well and this is an added bonus when keeping them in your average backyard. The average hen weighs around 3kgs but a bantam version exists.

Category: large, meat, white plumage, eggs (up to 240 light brown eggs per year), family pet

Norfolk Grey

Norfolk Grey Image from wikipedia.org

The Norfolk Grey (Back Marias) are distinguished by the silver neck feathers. They like to forage and are cheap to raise if you allow them to free-range.

They are friendly and docile and their poor flying skills make them a good choice for the backyard.

Category: large, meat, rare, black plumage, good egg layer (up to 220 tinted eggs), good family pets

Orpington Chickens

Orpington chickens make great backyard chickens as they are great egg layers and are relatively quiet.

Orpington

Orpingtons are handy egg producers (up to 200 each year), produce fine textured meat, and they make great family pets. They are very relaxed, happy chickens, and are good around children.

They don't need a lot of attention and they don't fly but they do like to roam. A bantam version is available.

Category: large, meat, black, brown or white plumage, egg production, family pet

Pekin

Pekin Image from wikipedia.org

Pekins are true bantams (also known as Cochin bantams). They don't produce a lot of eggs but they are very cute fluffy bundles of feathers and make great family pets. They are docile and friendly although the roosters can become aggressive.

Category: small, family pet

Phoenix

Phoenix Image from wikipedia.org

The Phoenix is a small chicken that is best suited for show purposes only. They tolerate heat very well but don't like the cold.

The spectacular tail is its most outstanding feature and this will require care to keep it in good shape. They are not good egg producers and are not friendly.

Category: small

Plymouth Chickens

These hens are the perfect pets for a small backyard with limited space

Plymouth Rock

Plymouth Rock chickens (also known as Amrocks) are good all-rounders; producing fine tasting meat, good numbers of eggs (240 per year), and they make great family friendly pets.

They are friendly and calm, easy to keep, and their inability to fly makes them a good choice for most backyards. Hens weigh around 3 kg but bantam versions exist.

Category: large, meat, black or white plumage, top layers, good for family pets

Rhode Island Red Colour Tone

Rhode Island Red chickens are a light red to tan colour with red beaks and yellow legs.

Rhode Island Red

Rhode Island Red chickens were originally bred in the late 1800's in little Compton, Rhode Island USA.

They were created by crossing various breeds including Asian Malays and Italian Brown Leghorns. They are the state bird of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island Reds were bred as a dual purpose bird. This means they are suitable to farm both for egg production (as they are a good layer) and for meat production (as they have a heavy build).

Rosecomb

Rosecomb Image from backyardpoultry.com

Rosecombs are true bantams (no larger version exists) that are really only ideally suited for show purposes. At 450g for the average hen there isn't much meat on them.

Their name comes from the red comb on their heads. They are not friendly birds and can be aggressive.

Category: small, black or white plumage

Silkie

Silkie Image from backyardpoultry.com

Silkie are small, soft and fluffy. Their placid, friendly, docile nature makes them a great choice as a pet chicken for your children.

They lay small eggs, and you can expect roughly 3 per week from them. They don't tolerate extremes of heat, cold or wet.

Category: small, black or white plumage, family pet

Sussex Chicken Breed

Great egg producers with calm and relaxed temperament

Sussex

Sussex chickens are great egg producers and their calm, even temperament, and poor flying skills makes them very easy to look after. They also produce a tasty meat. Hens average around 3kg but a bantam version is available.

Category: large, meat, white or brown plumage, high yield egg layers (200 light brown eggs per year).

Gold Laced Wyandotte (aka. Golden Laced)

It's the second most popular found today. They have golden feathers with a black edging.

Wyandotte

Wyandotte chickens are another great egg laying chicken producing around 200 brown eggs each year. Wyandottes are very calm and gentle chickens and they thrive in cold conditions. Wyandottes are large chickens but they are available as bantams too.

Their characteristic silver lace colour pattern marks the Wyandotte as a special chicken. Wyandottes originated in the U.S. where the breed was officially recognised in 1883. The hen weighs around 3.17 kg, the bantam weighs around 1.36kg.

Category: large, meat, black, brown or white plumage, top egg producers (brown eggs), family pets

Coop Tips and Tricks

What Should be Inside a Chicken Coop

Before you even bring home your baby chicks, you should have a plan in place for building their future home. Once your chicks are old enough, they will move out of the brooder and into a chicken coop. The chicken coop should provide your flock with everything they require to meet their daily and instinctual needs. This includes shelter, protection, food, water, a place to roost, a place to lay eggs, and a safe place to stretch their legs and interact no matter the weather! Raising a happy, healthy flock starts by having a safe and functional chicken coop ready for them to live in!

Just the Guidelines

With the world of design and architectural plans just a few clicks away, the volume of chicken coop designs has skyrocketed right along with the growing interest of raising backyard chickens. For as many flock owners as there are, there are just as many unique chicken coops! Chicken coops can be as fancy or as simple as you'd like. However, there are several key guidelines you must follow to make the chicken coop functional. This post is not intended to advise on any specific building plans or tell you how to build your coop. Our goal is to teach you what to look for as you shop for a coop, or ensure you have the guidelines to create and design your own amazing coop.

How to Set Up a Chicken Coop: The Groundwork

The placement of the chicken coop will affect the health and safety of your flock. Ideally, the chicken coop should be located in a shaded spot that is on high, level ground. You generally want to go with a more shaded location if you have the option. Chickens can handle cooler temperatures a lot easier than warmer temperatures. Placing the coop where it can stay shaded and cool during the summer is important for preventing heat related ailments with your flock. Shaded locations are often protected locations, which is helpful during the winter. Having a natural weather and wind-block near the coop will prevent any environmental stress if you live in a location that experiences varying weather conditions.

Along with location, you also need to consider the size of the chicken coop. Consider these important factors:

- How many chickens you are starting off with?

- How many chickens you plan to get in the future?

- Allow for chicken math (because it's real!)

- Consider including storage space

On average, allow for 2-3 square feet of coop space per standard size chicken. Even if you are starting off with a small flock, always plan out a larger coop than you will need! For bantam chicken breeds (basically miniature chickens), allow for 1-2 square feet per bantam. You will want to take into consideration the amount of space that feeders, waterers, nesting boxes, and roosts will take up within the coop as well.

Having additional storage space in the chicken coop is not essential, however, it is helpful for storing feed and for keeping cleaning supplies handy and near the flock. Storage space within the coop will need to be kept clean and tidy to prevent any

pests or predators from taking up residence in the storage space with a free buffet nearby (aka, your flock 🤪). Aside from storing supplies, having extra space attached to the chicken area of the coop is helpful for preventing chickens from escaping, collecting eggs without entering the chicken area, and for cleaning the coop.

The materials that the chicken coop is made from should be strong and sturdy. Wood is an ideal building material since it can be built into a strong, sturdy, and long-lasting structure. The chicken coop building material should also be weather resistant and predator proof. Rain, wind, snow, hail, or sleet, nothing should affect the durability of your chicken coop! The coop materials should not be able to be chewed through, torn apart, or dug under. Predators can be determined creatures, and the coop must keep your flock safe!

If you're designing your own coop, a few basic layout tips can help vastly optimize your overall setup. If you're shopping for a coop, you can use these criteria to judge the best option:

- Usually, the chicken door should be located on the south facing side of the chicken coop.

- If designing a large coop, include a full-size door to make it easier for you to access the coop and clean the coop.

- Windows should be located on the east and west facing sides of the chicken coop.

- Avoid having the windows placed above or across from the roosts to prevent any drafts or winds from bothering the chickens while they sleep.

- Block off or avoid having any unintentional ledges, shelves, or rafters within the chicken area that the chickens may be tempted to roost (and poop) on.

- Avoid having dark corners in the coop.

- Design the coop with ease of cleaning in mind!

Roofing & Flooring

The chicken coop roof and floor should be built out of strong, sturdy materials, much like the overall chicken coop. Both the roof and the floor should be weather-proof and predator-proof. The roof should keep rain and other precipitation out of the chicken coop and it should also shed water to prevent any build-up of precipitation on the top of the coop. The floor of the chicken coop should be made from solid material. Having a solid floor versus a wire floor in the coop allows you to use a litter in the coop. Litter helps make coop cleaning easier, is more predator proof, and is healthiest for the chickens. The coop roof and floor should not allow any access points for predators to sneak through or under and enter the chicken coop.

Ventilation & Light

Adequate ventilation and light in the chicken coop are essential to the health of your flock. Ventilation allows for the old, stale air contained within the coop to be exchanged with fresh, oxygen laden air from the outdoors. Proper ventilation also keeps ammonia fumes from building up within the coop, a problem that can also be prevented by adequate coop cleaning.

You want the chicken coop to be well ventilated but without drafts. The difference between ventilation and drafts is a matter of air flow. Ventilation allows for air exchange whereas drafts are a one-way air current that often blow cold air into the coop.

Ways to maintain ventilation in your coop include:

- Install windows that can be opened or closed depending on the weather.

- Build air vents near the roof of the coop that allow for air exchange.

Design your coop to include a cupola that allows for coop ventilation. Any open ventilation holes should be covered with ¼" hardware cloth to keep out predators.

Having a well-lit chicken coop is also essential for both the health of your flock and to make cleaning and coop maintenance easier for you. You can use natural light, artificial light, or a combination of both. To achieve a well-lit coop with natural light, you should have plenty of large windows. If you live in a region that has cold winters, you will want to consider how you can partially insulate the large windows during the winter while still allowing in natural light. Artificial lighting is also an option if you install electricity out at the chicken coop or rig up a solar light system. LED rope lights are a great option as they are safe to use in the coop and provide a soft light that puts less strain on the hens.

Again, design plays a key factor in the success of your coop. A well-ventilated coop and well-lit coop can be achieved through a few thoughtful design considerations, such as windows. There are a few tips you should consider when installing windows in the chicken coop:

- Have windows on the east and west sides of the coop to maximize the amount of natural light that shines into the coop.

- Consider having windows that can be opened or closed depending on the temperature and weather.

- If the windows can't be opened and closed, then have a method of insulating the windows for when you have to winterize the coop.

- Make sure the windows are predator-proof. Cover the inside of the windows with ¼" hardware cloth to keep most predators out.

Nesting Boxes

For the laying flock, nesting boxes are an essential element in coop design! Hens like to lay their eggs in locations that appear safe, slightly dark, and have clean litter. This is exactly what the nesting boxes should achieve in your chicken coop. You should provide one nesting box for every 4-5 laying hens in your flock. Hens like to have choices when they are looking for a spot to lay their eggs. Even then, you will often find that all your hens will prefer to lay in the same box. This is a result of their nesting instinct, as it is natural for a hen to build up a clutch of eggs, even if they aren't all her own, to sit on and incubate. Don't worry- only broody hens will go through the process of incubating and hatching a clutch of eggs.

The nesting boxes should be the proper size for your hens while also being able to accommodate the largest hen in your flock. Here are some size standards to keep in mind:

Large breed nesting box size- 14" wide x 14" high x 12" deep

Medium breed nesting box size- 12" wide x 14" high x 12" deep

Place your nesting boxes within the chicken coop. If you design the boxes so that they can be accessed from outside of the coop, make sure the latch on the boxes is secure so that no predators can sneak in through the nesting boxes. However, it's easier to have the nesting boxes installed completely within the coop.

Line your nesting boxes with clean litter and have a rail running along the outside. The rail makes it easier for the hens to access the nesting boxes. It should be no further than 5" away from the nesting boxes to discourage the hens from using the rail as a roost. Ensure your nesting boxes are lower than the roosting bars in the coop. Chickens instinctually look for the highest place to roost (sleep) for the night. If they start roosting in the nesting boxes, it can lead to a host of unintended consequences. To discourage your hens from wanting to sleep in the nesting boxes, make sure they are lower than the roosting bars.

Roosts

Roosts are what chickens sleep on at night. Chickens instinctively look for someplace safe and high off the ground to perch for the night. The roosts in the chicken coop should be a safe place that appeals to your flock's instinctual roosting habits.

Chicken Roost Designs

There are two common types of roosts to use in the chicken coop:

- ladder roosts- these roosts are staggered vertically, much like a ladder leaning up against a wall

- horizontal roosts- these are roosting bars that generally run across one side of the coop and are parallel to the coop wall

Ladder roosts give your flock the option of perching high or low, depending on the breed and weight of the bird. Horizontal roosts often make droppings management easier. If you have heavier breeds in your flock, you will want to make sure the roosts are not higher than 2-3 feet off the ground. Heavier breeds can have feet and leg issues if they are routinely jumping up and down from high roosts. For lighter, more agile breeds the roosts can be slightly higher off the ground since these breeds will want roost in higher places. Allow for 8-12 inches of roost space per chicken, and of course, allow for flock additions and chicken math to occur!

Roosts can be made from a variety of materials, as long as they are safe and provide good grip for the chickens. Two by four boards that have been sanded make for great roosting boards. Rough but sturdy tree branches will also work as roosting bars. Do not use dowels or other slippery, round materials. You want the roosts to have enough purchase for the chickens to get a good grip and not slip off, but you also want the roosts to be splinter free. Don't use materials that could potentially cut or splinter off into a chicken's foot. Roughly sanding down the roosts ever so often is a good idea for keeping the roosts safe and clean.

Droppings Management System

Having a droppings management system in the chicken coop is not essential, but it sure helps with cleaning the coop! Chickens poop at night while they roost. That means every morning there will be a collection of droppings that needs to be removed so that no ammonia fumes build up within the coop. Installing a droppings management system below the roosts can make morning clean up go a lot faster and it can also prevent your flock from having to walk through the droppings every morning. A couple of popular droppings management systems include:

Droppings boards- These boards are mounted about 4-5" below the roosts and extend about 6-7" beyond the roosts on either side. They catch the nightly droppings so that in the morning the poop just has to be scrapped off the board and into a bucket to be deposited in a compost pile.

Poop slings- Slings are made from sturdy fabric and are slung below the roosts. The slings collect the nightly droppings and then are cleaned off in the morning.

Poop trays- Poop trays are trays that are positioned below the roosts and lined with litter to make removing the nightly droppings easier in the morning. The trays just need to be dumped out and re-installed for the next night. It helps to have a hardware or chicken wire covering fashioned over poop trays to keep the chickens from walking through the trays in the morning.

Droppings boards work well for horizontal roosting systems whereas poop slings and poop trays work well with ladder roosting systems.

Feeders and Waterers

Your flock's feeder and waterer can either be kept inside the coop or outside in the enclosure that is attached to the chicken coop. If the feed and water is kept inside the coop, account for this space in your coop design. You must also be very careful about cleaning up spills. Spilled feed will attract rodents and predators. Spilled water will dampen the litter and provide a place for bacteria to grow.

If you keep the feed and water outside, you will want to at least bring the feeder in to a safe location every night. Predators will be attracted to chicken feed, which is something you want to avoid. Depending on how many chickens you are raising, you may need more than one feeder or waterer. Consider the location and how much space the feeder and water system will require in the coop.

How much space the feeder and water require may depend on the type of system you choose to use. Hanging systems are often the best choice for getting the most out of your coop space since they simply hang from the coop ceiling and don't require additional floor space. However, free-standing systems can also be used, or you can create systems that mount right to the coop wall. Feeders and water systems should always be at back height to your shortest chicken. This height limits feed waste and helps keep both the feed and water clean. Whatever feeding and water system you choose to use, just make sure it is easy for the chickens to access, can't be tipped over or jostled, and that it keeps the contents clean and free of debris.

Some popular chicken feeder and water systems include:

- Poultry water nipples- can be fashioned into a hanging system or a wall-mount system

- Bell feeders and waterers- can be hung or created into a free-standing system

- Homemade PVC feeder and waterers- can be made into hanging systems or free-standing systems

Doors

The doors of the chicken coop are pretty self-explanatory, but you should be aware that a chicken coop needs at least two doors: one for the chickens to use and one for you to use! The chicken door should lead from the chicken coop to the enclosure that is attached to the chicken coop. It should be large enough to accommodate your largest hen, but it does not need to be a full-size door. The chicken door may also need a ramp that leads down from the coop to the ground in the enclosure. The door that you use should be a full-size door so that you can come and go with ease as you clean and maintain the coop.

Any doors installed at the chicken coop should be predator proof and able to be latched securely. Screen doors can be used as long as they are installed with a storm door that must be closed every night to keep predators out. Latches used to close doors should be easy to use but too tricky for predators to figure out how to open.

The chicken door will need to be opened every morning and closed every evening after your flock has gone in to roost for the night. For even greater luxury, you may consider investing in an automatic chicken door. These can be programmed to open and close at certain times or at dawn and dusk. Quality automatic chicken doors are easy to install, are safe for the chickens, and are predator proof.



Electricity

Another nonessential but helpful feature out at the coop is electricity. Having electricity installed out at the coop can be helpful for various reasons:

If you live in cold regions, electricity allows you to use electric water heaters to keep water from freezing during the winter.

Electricity gives you the option of supplying supplemental light during short winter days to encourage your hens to keep laying.

It can also be very helpful for cleaning the coop and running electric appliances like a shop-vac or power washer.

Electricity that is installed out at the coop should be safe and hazard free. Keep electrical outlets out of the chicken area and any cords should be securely fastened down. The electricity should be properly installed, and all electrical safety measures should be followed. No open wires or outlets should be present in the chicken coop. Always follow any code requirements based on your location.

Enclosure

The final item to consider when building or designing a chicken coop is the enclosure. An ideal enclosure is attached to the chicken coop by a door, allowing your flock easy access to both spaces. A full-size door should also be installed in the enclosure so that you can easily enter and exit.

It's important that any enclosure is both weather-proof and predator proof. This allows your flock to get safe exercise no matter the weather. It also helps prevent boredom and allows the chickens to participate in normal bird activities on a daily

basis. You will find that your flock will spend a majority of their day outside in their enclosure, which helps keep the chicken coop cleaner.

The chicken coop enclosure should allow about 8-10 square feet of space per chicken. A spacious enclosure will pay off in the long run with preventing behavior issues, boosting flock health, and keeping the coop clean. The enclosure should be completely encased in a predator proof material. Some are better than others, but here is a few popular options:

Chicken wire- Not entirely predator proof, but the cheapest option.

Hardwire cloth (1/4")- The most predator proof choice.

Galvanized livestock fencing- Galvanized fencing is very predator proof but can allow access for smaller predators like weasels, snakes, and opossums.

Poultry netting- Poultry netting is the least predator proof.

The chicken coop enclosure should be covered and have a well-draining litter on the ground. A covered enclosure allows for year-round daily use and protects against arial predators. A well-draining litter keeps the enclosure from getting too muddy or wet, which is essential for maintaining flock health. Having loose soil in the enclosure stimulates natural flock behaviors like dust bathing and foraging.

The enclosure can also be a great place to include entertainment features.

Homemade perches, ramps, balance beams, swings, and other chicken toys can all be installed in the chicken coop enclosure to stimulate activity and prevent boredom.

The feeder and water can also be kept in the chicken coop enclosure during the day. Just make sure you bring the feeder inside every evening to avoid attracting predators.

Fun & Functional!

Make your chicken coop as fancy as you want it, just make sure the coop includes all the essential elements like roosts, nesting boxes, a feeding system, and a water system. By following these guidelines, you can be sure that your chicken coop is both functional and fun for you and your flock. A safe, secure chicken coop combined with a spacious, predator proof enclosure will make for a happy and healthy flock of chickens!

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