



# RAISING BACKYARD CHICKENS



**Chickens have basically only 3  
needs – a secure shelter  
food  
and clean water**

# Chicken Facts

- You do not need a rooster for hens to produce eggs
- Chickens love a good dirt bath
- Chickens are the closest living relative to the Tyrannosaurus Rex
- More chickens are raised and killed for food than any other land animal combined
- Chickens can distinguish between more than 100 faces of people or animals
- There are more chickens on earth than people
- As chicken grow older, they lay larger eggs, but fewer than when they were younger
- Chickens can taste saltiness but not sweetness
- A mother hen turns her eggs about 50 times per day
- The record number of eggs laid by a chicken in one day is 7
- The record for the most yolks in one egg is 9 yolks
- The color of the egg depends on the chicken's ear lobes. Red ear lobed chickens lay brown eggs, white ear lobed chickens lay white eggs, while blue or green lobed chickens will produce a colored egg.
- A hen must eat about four pounds of feed to make one dozen eggs.
- When a chicken gets its head cut off it can run the length of a football field before dropping dead.
- A chicken eggs nutritional value is the same, regardless of the egg color

# Where to buy chicks

- Chicks are available locally in the spring
- Olsens and Tractor Supply will get different breeds in on different dates.  
A list will come out in the beginning of the season with the arrival info
- Most pullet chicks average around \$5.00, roosters are a little less
- You can order chicks online from hatcheries and they will arrive chirping loudly at the post office.
  - McMurray Hatchery
  - MyPetChicken.com
  - Town line Hatchery
  - Stromberg's Chickens

**Once you've decided to raise a backyard flock do you want adult birds or babies?**

**Adult birds can give you instant gratification with eggs right away. But hand raising chicks can be rewarding in it's own way. With adult birds you can seldom be sure of their age. With chicks you always know their age precisely. You can get chicks from your local feed store or via mail order to your local post office. Day old chick do not need food or water for the first 3 days. They can do quite well on what they absorbed while still in the shell. They will need a heat source as they cannot keep warm without assistance, either from Mom or a heat lamp. If the temperature is too warm, they will move away from the source. If it's too cold they will move toward the heat source.**

**Now that you have chickens, you need to keep them engaged. They can be so entertaining. Watching my chickens run around the yard scratching and pecking can keep me entertained for long periods. Chickens need exercise to stay healthy.**

**They need to run and jump and fly no matter how goofy they look. They need to take dust baths. Watching them dig into the soft soil and wallow around while flipping the dirt up onto their backs and under their wings, you may think they've lost their minds. They need to do this to keep their feathers clean and keep parasites at bay. During high heat days a cooling treat of frozen berries or corn kernels frozen in water will help them stay hydrated and stimulate their little brains.**

# Raising Chicks

## Temperature chart for your new chicks

### Age of Chicks

Hatch to 1 Week	95°F
1-2 Weeks	90°F
2-3 Weeks	85°F
3-4 Weeks	80°F
4-5 Weeks	75°F

Recommended Temperature

Talk with your Purina® retailer to learn about ideal temperatures for other poultry.



- Chicks will only be a couple of days old when purchased
- Pullets are supposed to be hens. (Not always the case)
- Straight runs means they are not sexed
- Keep fresh water available, adjust height of water as they grow
- Feed a Starter-Grower Mash until 18 weeks old
- You can feed a medicated starter mash if they have not been vaccinated for coccidiosis
- Coccidiosis is a common intestinal disease caused by several different species of parasites
- Keep their area as dry as possible
- Keep indoors (garage or shed) until about 6 weeks old
- Use a heat lamp to keep them warm
- Leave room for them to get away from the heat if they are too hot
- Chicks can get very messy especially when they start to lose their fluff



# Chick Supplies





# Housing



## **Secure shelter**

**Size does matter. 4 to 10 square feet of space per bird is recommended for a happy healthy flock. 4 square feet inside if they are allowed to free range, meaning to wander around without constraints , scratching and pecking for grubs, worms and insects, or even a lizard or mouse. Chickens are Omnivores, they will eat just about anything.**

**10 square feet per bird if they are always confined. Basically, they need a predator proof house and a yard where they can come and go at will.**

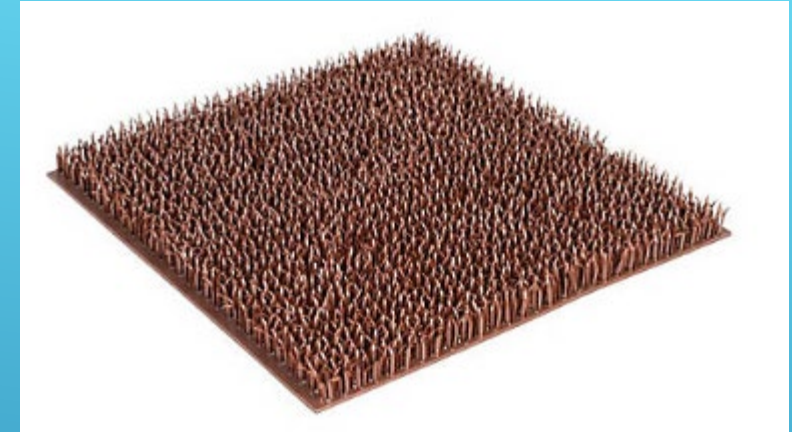
**The other thing that needs to be secured is, anywhere you do not want them digging. IE: Flowerbeds, Garden Areas, Porch/Patio Areas, places where your children play. Chickens are indiscriminate diggers and poopers. Chickens can fly, although not very well, so you need to keep that in mind. I use a 2-foot fence of bird netting to keep them out of areas where they are not wanted. It's working well so far.**

**Once Egg laying has begun you need to make sure they have private, clean, comfey boxes lined with straw or pine shavings. They generally will not poop in the nest boxes, just everywhere else. Chickens do best in a familiar routine. They don't really like change.**



# Nest Boxes

- Nest boxes should be about 12" square
- One nest box for every four or five chickens
- Hens like to lay in a dark safe area
- Nest boxes should be at least a few inches off the ground
- Lining the bottom of the nest box with vinyl flooring makes cleaning easier
- Nest mats with shavings make a nice cushion



**Buttercup Comb**



**Cushlon Comb**



**Rose Comb**



**Single Comb**



**Strawberry Comb**



**Pea Comb**



**V Comb**



**Walnut Comb**



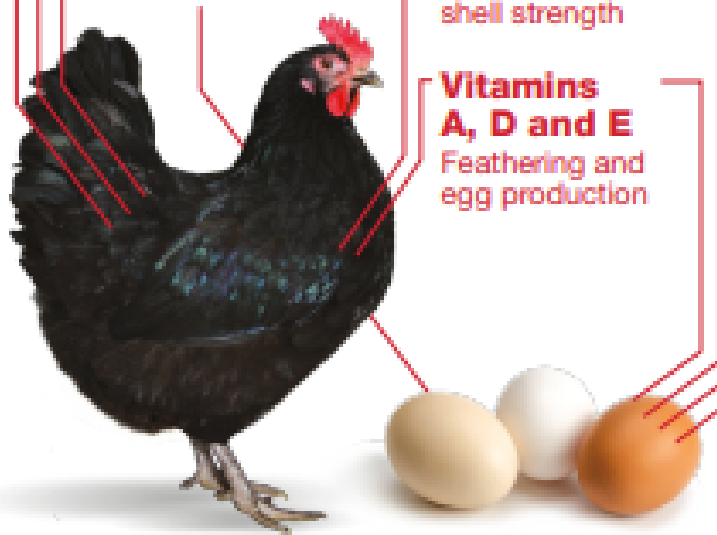
# Feeding

Egg production will start at about 18 to 20 weeks of age. You will need to switch their feed to one specifically for laying hens. The feed will usually have added calcium to form a strong eggshell. You can also offer oyster shells for added calcium

Grit should be provided if the chickens don't have access to dirt. If they have the opportunity to scratch in dirt they will pick up small pebbles these go into the gizzard to grind up their food before it goes in the digestive tract.

Chickens are very messy. Be sure to change their water daily.

## What to look for in a layer feed



- 16% protein, 3.25% calcium**  
Day-to-day performance
- Added omega-3**  
Egg nutrition
- Prebiotics & probiotics**  
Immune and digestive health
- Marigold extract**  
Rich, yellow yolks
- Amino acids**  
Feathering and egg production
- Calcium, manganese & trace minerals**  
Bone and shell strength
- Vitamins A, D and E**  
Feathering and egg production



## Food and water

If you get day old chicks they need to have special feed and waterers for their protection. They come in plastic and metal. Both are expensive. The feeder keeps them from pooping in the feed and the waterer keeps them from getting wet and or drowning. Chick feed is very high protein and comes in small crumbs for the littles.

When it comes to full size birds there are options – Layer pellets and Layer crumbles. There is also Scratch Grains, mostly crushed corn, millet and wheat. Both forms of Layer are 16% protein. The hens need that protein to produce eggs. They also need Calcium, either in the form of Oyster Shells or, my preferred way is to rinse the egg shells and crush them once dry. I feed both Scratch and Layer pellets. I find with Layer Crumble there is a lot of waste. I also give my birds all of my kitchen scraps. Even if they don't eat it, it becomes compost for the garden area.

# Feeding scraps is not recommended but the chickens love them. Just use moderation

## Good scraps for chicken

- Most fruit and vegetable scraps (cooked or raw)
- Grains
- Cooked meat
- Cooked fish or seafood
- Seeds
- Cooked beans
- Eggs (ensure they are unrecognizable, so your chickens don't learn to steal eggs from the nesting boxes)

## Bad scraps for chicken

- Foods high in fat, sugar or salt
- Processed foods
- Raw potato
- Avocado
- Food that is mouldy, rancid, rotten or spoiled
- Chocolate
- Coffee
- Dried beans
- Plants high in oxalates such as rhubarb leaves or uncooked warrigal greens (New Zealand spinach)

# Storing Eggs

- When the hen lays an egg the hen's body deposits a protective coating on the outside of the shell called the egg cuticle or egg bloom. This is a layer of protein that seals the otherwise porous shell. This prevents bacteria from entering the egg
- Do not wash fresh eggs
- Unwashed eggs can be safely stored unrefrigerated for up to two weeks
- Washed eggs must be refrigerated
- You can store unwashed eggs in the refrigerator for two to three months
- It is best to store eggs with the rounded end up
- If in doubt if an egg is good put it in a bowl of water, If it floats it's probably bad.
- Eggs that are a few weeks old are much easier to peel when hard boiling

# Sick Chicken

Common indications of a sick chicken include: hiding, inactivity, pale comb or wattles, unusual droppings, unusual posture, lethargy, lack of appetite and reduced egg production- all indications that closer observation is needed.

## Sticktight fleas

The sticktight flea is an occasional pest of dogs and cats, as well as of chickens and other birds. Poultry sometimes have clusters of these fleas around the eyes, comb, wattles, and other bare spots. These dark-brown fleas have their heads embedded in the host's flesh and cannot be brushed off.



# Molting

- Chicken will lose their old feathers so that new feathers can grow in
- They can molt up to a couple times a year
- The molting process usually lasts for 8-12 weeks but can last up to 6 months
- The first molt is usually at about 18 months old
- They start to molt as the daylight gets shorter
- Egg production will slow down or stop





Winter is the time when most adult chickens will molt or lose feathers so they can grow new ones. During this time, along with shortened hours of sunlight, egg production will decrease if not stop all together. You can help them through molting by increasing their treats, along with there regular feed. Scrambled or boiled eggs, yogurt, cottage cheese, tuna, sardines, pumpkin seeds and meal worms are all loaded with protein that they need for feather production. I sometimes make a large pot of oatmeal that has lots of bacon grease mixed into it on really cold days. Once in a while I will give my girls a whole pumpkin or winter squash cut into quarters for an extra treat. They will peck it down to the skin. Don't gave all these treats at the same time. Spread them out over weeks. You don't want them to get to spoiled.





**What do you want chickens for, eggs, meat, pets?**

**If you want chickens for meat, you would need to get meat birds, also called fryers or broilers. Meat birds mature really fast, 7 to 10 weeks depending if they are fryers or broilers. Meat birds have heavy breasts and legs and do not have a long life span. They are prone to broken legs and other crippling issues due to their heavy size and rapid growth on their small bodies.**

**There are multipurpose birds for both meat and egg production. And then there are egg layers. Eggs can come in many different colors, from white, thru tan to dark brown. White Leghorns and Wyandotte breed are the most prolific layers. I have 1 White Leghorn and in the past year she has only not laid an egg 3 times. I can count on her for 1 white egg everyday. Easter eggers lay pastel colored eggs rest of my girls lay brown eggs in varying shades. Marans lay dark chocolate colored eggs. Orpingtons and Cochins tend to be the most friendly breeds. Although your hens will follow you like puppies once they associate you with food.**

**You do not need a Rooster in order to have eggs. You only need a Roo if you want to have home grown chicks. One rooster per 10 to 12 hens is the ideal ratio. If you do allow your hens to hatch a clutch of fertile eggs you should expect a 50/50 mix of hens and cockerels. You can always eat your young Roos, or give them away.**



# Dual Purpose Breeds Eggs or Meat

**Australorp**



**Speckled Sussex**



**Wyandotte**



**Rhode Island Red**



**Orpington**



# Dual Purpose Breeds Eggs or Meat

Plymouth (Barred) Rock



Jersey Giants



Dominique







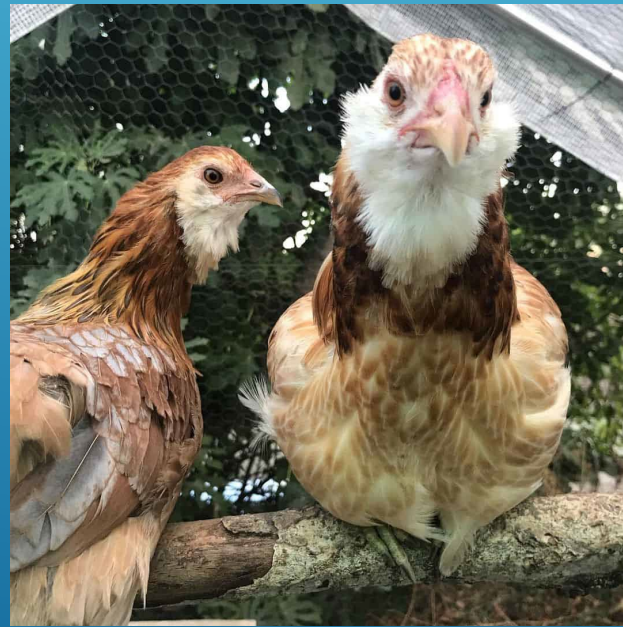


# Colored Egg Layers (Blue-Green)

**Ameraucana**



**Araucana**



**Easter Egger**



**Cream Legbar**





# White Egg Layers

## White Leghorn



## Hamburg



## Andalusian



## Polish



## California White



## **Predators and how to avoid them –**

**Start with a secure house and yard. My hen house is raised off the ground but the hens cannot get under it from inside their yard. They can hide under it in the event of a hawk or other flying predator while they are out free ranging. Their secure yard has chicken wire walls that extend out under ground to prevent predators from digging in under their walls. The perimeter of the yard has pressure treated 2X6's on top of the buried chicken wire. The top of their walls have a roof of chicken wire secured to 2X4s. On top of that I have the yard covered with shade cloth. The shade cloth works for shade but keeps no rain or snow out. I keep several inches of bedding, pine shavings or straw, on the floor of their house to catch and absorb their nocturnal droppings. They seem to poop a lot at night. The bedding makes it easier to clean the coop and goes straight into new garden beds or the compost. Once your chickens feel at home in their secure place, as the sun sinks in the West, they will go home to bed. If you have let them out to free range, don't forget to shut the doors and keep them safe from nocturnal predators such as skunks and foxes.**