

BACKYARD CHICKENS

HOW TO RAISE CHICKENS IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD
FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND EXTRA INCOME



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Introduction

When it comes to birds domesticated and kept for their eggs, meat, or feathers, no poultry is more popular worldwide than the chicken.

In fact, there are about **eight chickens for every human being on the planet**, with more than 60 billion chickens raised annually.

Smaller than the vast majority of other commonplace livestock like cattle, pigs, or sheep, chickens are generally considered to be both the easiest working animals to upkeep and the most efficient producers per square foot.

As communities become increasingly reliant on local restaurants and grocery stores for their food security, more and more families

are choosing to turn unused backyard space into their very own chicken farm.

Even outside of food production, chickens continue to grow in popularity both as pets and, thanks to their colorful plumage, as competitive show animals.

Combined with organic raised beds or larger scale foodscaping, choosing to invest in poultry farming remains one of the most productive uses for almost any backyard, big or small.

As egg producers, chickens have no equal in the modern world. Worldwide, hens laid more than 62 million metric tons of eggs in 2009. By 2017, that figure increased to more than 80 million.

Every aspect of the chicken egg is edible, including the shell, which can be finely ground into a natural calcium supplement.

When cooked, a single 100-gram egg serving contains more than 12 grams of protein, 46% Daily Value of Vitamin B₁₂, 42% DV of B₂, and only one carb.

In terms of meat production, chickens can be prepared to fit almost any cultural cuisine. With the simple addition of spices, sauces, or side dishes, chicken meat can be baked, grilled, fried, barbecued, or even cooked rotisserie style.

Containing less saturated fat and cholesterol than beef, veal, venison, and other red meats, chicken meat represents one of the healthiest sources of protein available.

With only 4 grams of fat and 31 grams of protein, a 100 gram baked chicken breast presents a much healthier alternative compared to the 10 grams of fat and only 27 grams of protein for the same portion of lean skirt steak.

Without a doubt, the choice to raise chickens is a powerful force in the growing urban agriculture movement.

In the following report, we will discuss the top tips and strategies you can follow to help make your own backyard chicken farm the best it can be.

Let's begin!

Set Realistic Expectations

The first step is to determine your own expectations. What do you hope to gain by adding chicks, roosters, or hens into your life?

Broilers

Urban chicken owners looking for a source of meat closer to home should turn to Broilers - chicken breeds ideal for quick maturation.

Amid the growing awareness of how severely factory farms produce just as much cruelty and disease as food goods, Broiler owners can rest easy knowing exactly where their meat is coming from and how it was raised.

Layers

Any homeowners looking for a steady supply of fresh, healthy eggs just out their back door won't be surprised why chickens are the perfect companion.

Certain hen breeds can provide over 300 eggs in a year! But, be warned, just like their human counterparts, female chickens only produce eggs for a limited time. So, before adding egg layers to the family, consider what you'll do when those feathered females reach *henopause*:

Option 1

The commercial farming approach to the issue is the most cost-efficient.

From a business mindset, there is no motive for continuing to invest the cost of feed once a hen ceases to produce. If a homeowner shares this view and isn't opposed to the act, then all "spent hens" can be equitably killed for their meat.

Option 2

For many homeowners, an attachment forms with the creatures that they care for and interact with daily.

If killing isn't an option, then only those willing to care for a hen until its comfortable, natural demise should consider pursuing the responsibility of owning Layers.

For reference, most hens significantly slow in their productivity after twelve months.

Depending on the breed, many chickens live for five to ten years, while the *Guinness World Record* is held by a hen who died of heart failure at the age of sixteen.

Pets

As with the later option associated with obtaining Layers, many urban agriculturalists are comfortable with committing to backyard chickens, even without any mind for their meat or eggs.

Just like any other pet, chickens have individual personalities, provide companionship, and, as such, are often bestowed with names.

They show affection, respond to their caregivers, and, although many breeds aren't as prone to cuddling, almost all, given comfort and time, will feed from a familiar hand.

Poultry Fancy

Some chicken owners operate with a mindset altogether different than those focused on food production or having a pet.

Just like canines and horses, some chickens are simply more attractive than others, to the extent that some hobbyists - and even careerists - selectively breed chicken heritages for the purpose of competitive exhibition shows.

Quick Tips

- ***Looking for a pet?*** The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not recommend bringing chickens indoors or letting small children handle them due to the birds' propensity to carry and transmit Salmonella in their dander and feces.
- ***The opposite of Super-Size: Bantams*** are miniature chickens, requiring less feed and space, making them exceedingly popular for those in search of a feathery pet.

Free Range vs Free Run

Free-Range

Nobody likes to be cramped, animals included. Providing a living space for your backyard chickens that is considered Free-Range, meaning each bird has at least one square meter of outdoor space, will enliven each chicken's ability to pursue their natural behaviors.

Yes, Broilers will grow slower... but that's because they will actually be able to move around and expend some of their energy.

They'll be able to peck, flap, forage, and scratch to their heart's content, reducing stress and improving circulation (both of which happen to improve taste).

Free-Run

If Free-Range isn't possible due to space constraints, Free-Run is the next best option. Instead of having a wider range of mobility outside, chickens are permitted to freely roam in an open space within an enclosed barn or similar structure.

The barn floor can also include perches and nesting boxes; however, it should be noted that Free-Run is only marginally better than caging systems.

Because an enclosed area lacks ventilation, the birds will be able to move around, but their activity will decrease the barn's air quality as they consistently kick up dust, dander, and fecal matter.

Regardless, a broader roaming region will always be an improvement on cages, where the chickens are forced to dwell directly in their own waste.

Organic Free-Range

The most fundamental improvement of a Free-Range system is the inclusion of Organic practices. The outdoor roaming range per bird is increased to at least two meters but can go up to ten meters per animal or higher.

Of course, an Organic classification entails strict limitations on the use of food and water additives, including medications and synthetic amino acids.

Quick Tips

- ***Consider Yarding:*** Systems that are Free-Range or better either entail the complete absence of a fence around flock movement, or a fence so distant that it fails to restrict roaming regardless.

Homeowners should consider *Yarding* if their options are limited to either Free-Run or a caging coop.

Instead of being restricted continuously to these enclosed

structures, an effort should be made to construct an outdoor fenced area for the birds to roam daily.

Maintain a Flock's Continuity

Before beginning your backyard conversion, consider that chickens are highly sociable creatures and associate together as a single flock.

The incubation of eggs and the raising of chicks are handled on a communal scale. Hens may rearrange eggs, moving another's to their own nest.

Subsequently, a flock typically will not lay in their own individual nests. Instead, they will all share a few locations.

However, this social order only manifests after a flock is able to develop its own literal pecking order.

Through acts of domination, the flock learns which of its members first get access to food and which get to choose nesting locations before all others.

When designing your enclosure, an effort should be made to maintain a flock's continuity as much as possible.

If your nesting shelter is divided, allowing the two or more separated groups to flock together during the day will likely introduce consistent strife.

Removing or adding roosters instigates a disruption in the flock's social order, which only regains stability after a new pecking order is established.

Adding young hens to an existing flock can likewise introduce acts of dominance and violence, opening the door to stress, injury, and even death.

Quick Tips:

- ***Use the right materials:*** Chicken excrement is fluid, consisting of both urine and feces. When constructing an enclosure, consider using materials with lower absorptive properties.

Stainless steel may be more expensive at first, but unsealed wooden structures will need to be replaced again and again as they soil, rot, and fester.

- ***Design for them; Design for you:*** When establishing a shelter structure, definitely choose a configuration that provides the best long term environment for your backyard feathered friends.

But don't forget that you will be interacting with that enclosure as well.

Whether you are collecting eggs, feeding, replacing bedding, or doing a seasonal deep clean, you want the experience to be as forgiving as possible.

The easier it is for you to care for your birds, the more likely it'll be that they are as healthy, hydrated, well-fed, and comfortable as possible.

Never Neglect Their Care and Maintenance

Believe it or not, the condition of a flock's bedding, the purity of their water, and the quality of their diet affect more than just the flock's overall health.

A bird's diet directly links to the flavor of its egg. The quality of Broiler meat is fundamentally attributed to hydration and the relative cleanliness of the body's environment.

For example: Rapeseed and soy, ingested by certain breeds, will imbue smells and flavors of fish into the chicken's eggs.

Quick Tip:

- ***Do a little each day, rather than all at once:*** Waiting until an enclosure is totally soiled will only dissuade a caregiver from

getting near.

Maintaining a flock's environment in small increments will instead keep both the birds and the homeowners in a state of consistent comfort.

Manage Waste Properly

Between eight and eleven pounds of manure is produced each month by most breeds.

Committing to a waste management plan is essential to both the health of the birds and that of the caregivers.

With sufficient drainage, water may be used to dissolve waste particles and flush enclosures.

Dry management includes the use of litter, such as sawdust, which must be removed and refreshed periodically.

Open land, which naturally cleanses itself of waste via precipitation, is also considered dry management, as any

excessive liquidity of the soil should be augmented by aggregates and drainage runoff systems.

Soiled litter is an ideal fertilizer, as it can be relatively easily transported.

Runoff from wet management presents the same fertility but is much more difficult to distribute across greater distances.

Quick Tip:

- ***Respirators, filters, and ventilation:*** For the safety of both caregivers and their flocks, wet management of waste should not occur with Layers, Broilers, or eggs present.

Furthermore, dry treatments should take place with the minimum amount of exposure to disturbed dust, which will contain fecal matter and potentially hazardous microorganisms. It is not advised to use any tool which will

excessively diffuse waste particles into breathable air (leaf blower, compressed air, broom, etc.).

Processing Poultry Products

Meat

Raw chicken may contain Salmonella or other potentials for foodborne illness.

The safe minimum cooking temperature recommended by the United States Department of Health and Human Services is 165 °F (74 °C).

Poultry constitutes several primary cuttings of meat, including:

- Chicken breasts, large, relatively dry muscles of white meat,
- Legs, consisting of a lower “drumstick” of dark meat and an upper thigh, also dark meat,

- Wings, each made up of a white meat drumette, a middle flat segment containing two bones, and a tip, largely discarded due to its relative toughness.

Other notable components include:

- Chicken Feet, relatively absent meatiness, but appreciated in many cultures for the skin and cartilage,
- Giblets, a general term for mixed internal organs, including the chicken's heart, gizzard, and/or liver,
- Oysters are small, round pieces of dark meat located on the chicken's lower back, near the upper thigh.

When freezing cleaned chicken components, it is best to do so in raw form, as significant moisture is lost during the cooking process.

Eggs

To examine the condition of harvested eggs, backlighting the shell via a process called candling reveals the size of its internal air cell.

Additionally, the egg can be confirmed to be fertilized if an embryo is observed.

Washing an egg cleans the outer shell of any contaminants, but simultaneously erodes the protective cuticle.

To prevent Salmonella, washed eggs should be refrigerated.

Unwashed, unbroken eggs can either be kept at room temperature or, to prevent outer contaminants from developing, can also be refrigerated.

Reduce Your Food Cost

Backyard poultry farming, as a means to reduce food costs, is totally dependent on the manner in which a homeowner establishes their project's extent.

For instance, a Free-Range Broiler reaches slaughter weight at approximately eight weeks of age, thereby requiring an equal amount of weeks worth of feed.

An Organic Free-Range Broiler takes an extra four weeks to reach optimum slaughter weight, a fifty percent increase in feed cost.

The Organic system's omission of in-feed and in-water medications, synthetic amino acids, and other additives can represent somewhat of a cost reduction depending on the homeowner's access to feed stores.

In addition to up-front cost savings on meat, access to backyard chickens may also enable other kinds of food savings.

For instance, chicken bones can be simmered amid herbs to produce chicken stock, an essential ingredient for countless dishes that would otherwise have to be purchased.

Quick Tip:

Vegetarian? If your household enjoys eggs but doesn't eat chicken... Feed your dog!

Canines are carnivorous by nature and, after all, are related to the ol' fox in the henhouse. Just remember to remove all bones before serving (cooked bones are brittle and will splinter).

How To Make Money With Chickens

There are numerous ways to turn a profit with even the most humble backyard poultry farm:

Breeding

Share your love of urban agriculture by breeding chicks and finding a new family looking to start their own flock.

Eggs

Selling eggs might sound old-school, but it's a multi-billion dollar market. The United Kingdom alone consumes more than 34 million eggs every single day!

For extra income, you can advertise a sign by your mailbox, host a booth at the local farmer's market, or even advertise online.

Meat

Raw, frozen chicken withholds all of its nutrients and can last for months, depending on the cutting. Who knows - that chic restaurant around the corner might just love to be able to offer local Free-Range poultry!

Stock

Within the same vein as eggs and meat, chicken stock is a vital component in kitchens the world over. Somewhere there's a chef without the time to cook down his own, forced to use cheap, flavorless store brands.

Could your organic chicken stock be the base of their new soup of the day?

Fertilizer

Selling bird poop might not sound glamorous, but gardeners will probably come shovel it themselves when you tell them that

chicken manure has the highest amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium of all animal wastes.

The Ultimate Childhood Companion

There is no doubt that taking part in the backyard poultry movement might prove to be a better influence when raising a family than owning a traditional pet, like a dog, cat, or guinea pig.

Exposing a child to the wonder of a backyard chicken farm will help to instill values of compassion, caring, and responsibility.

Growing up with a reminder so close to home that it is indeed possible to provide for oneself, a family can pass down self-reliance and dedication atop the standard traditions of childhood learning.

For the household keen on practical education, an urban chicken farm is the perfect means to introduce kids to the circle of life.

Maintain a Mild Setting

The multitude of chicken breeds each have their own unique environmental preferences, but all thrive in the absence of excess heat and cold.

Maintaining a mild setting for your birds will not only keep them healthy, but it will also maximize their productivity.

Ample drainage of your chickens' roaming zones is essential in the minimization of worms, coccidial oocysts, and festering microbes.

With a balance of ventilation and protection from harsh winds, surface dampness can be adequately minimized.

Coupled with fencing appropriate for the prevention of invasive reptiles, rodents, canines, felines, and wild birds, a dry, clean enclosure will protect your chickens from predators and parasites alike.

Quick Tip:

- ***Keep sickness and disease at bay:*** Lice, mites, ticks, fleas, and intestinal worms are among the most common parasitic dangers facing any potential poultry farm.

Become familiar with the following list of ailments, research all others that might pertain to your region, and increase in awareness of your flock's health.

- Histomoniasis (blackhead disease)
- Botulism
- Red Mites
- Gapeworm
- Infectious bursal disease (Gumboro)
- Bumblefoot

Conclusion

Whether as egg producers, Broilers for meat, family companions, or sources of nutrient-dense fertilizer, taking the leap and beginning a backyard urban chicken farm can prove fruitful.

Not only is it an exceptional experience, but it also offers ample opportunities for a healthier lifestyle, a more sustainable footprint, and financial sovereignty.

With determination, dedication and a bit of time and research, you too can join the movement!

To your success,

Resources

Here are links to a few resources that I believe will help you:

Beginners Guide to Raising Chickens:

>> <https://www.almanac.com/news/home-health/chickens/raising-chickens-101-how-get-started>

How to Raise Happy Chickens:

>> <https://www.countryliving.com/life/kids-pets/a32102474/raising-chickens/>

How to Raise Chickens in 7 Easy Steps:

>> <https://wholefully.com/how-to-start-raising-backyard-chickens-in-7-simple-steps/>

Backyard Chickens Blog:

>> <https://www.backyardchickens.com/articles/how-to-raise-chickens.47660/>