



Basic Poultry Care

by Kevin Ellis

Shelter

A backyard flock will need a coop or house that will:

- Keep them dry and out of the elements
- Keep them safe from predators
- Provide adequate airflow; vent near the top to prevent ammonia buildup

Roosts should be provided for the flock to sleep on at night

- Each bird will require at least a foot of roost space

Nest boxes should be provided for the chickens to lay eggs in.

- They should be darkened and give the bird a sense of security

Shelter can be mobile (small “chicken tractor” moved around the yard), or fixed (stationary chicken coop with an enclosed run)

Brooding

If buying day-old chicks, they must get their start in a brooder

Need a rounded area that provides adequate access to feed and water at all times

Should be kept at 95-90° F for the first week

- Temperature should be decreased by 5° each week (or roughly 1° per day) until the brooder temperature is equal to the ambient temperature throughout the day.
- After 3-4 weeks, chickens should be ready to move to the coop

Equipment required includes feeders, waterers, heat lamps (and/or heaters), bedding (wood shavings, or peat moss) and an enclosure



Feed

Birds need a well-rounded diet in order to produce eggs and conduct regular body maintenance

A pre-mixed feed ration should be provided

- Diets usually start with high protein (18-21%) and then decrease as the bird ages (down to 14-16%)
- Starter Feed -> Grower Feed -> Layer Feed ->
- Some feed a same ration of 16% protein throughout the life of the flock

Grit, such as oyster shell, should be provided at all times either through free choice feeding or mixed into feed rations. This will aid in digestion.

Feed should be stored for no longer than 2 months

Backyard chickens will happily eat leftover food scraps. While they will happily eat almost everything, be sure to avoid:

- Spoiled or rotten meat
- Rhubarb
- Green potato skins
- Overly spiced or seasoned foods

Water

Backyard chickens should have a continuous source of cool water available.

Waterers should be cleaned periodically to prevent algae build up

Waterers should be placed in a consistent spot so the birds know where to go for water

Waste Management

Bedding should be used in high traffic areas such as the coop or an associated enclosed run

Wood shavings, peat moss, or peanut hulls can all be used

Bedding should be changed periodically to avoid ammonia build up

Manure and bedding should be properly composted before being added to a garden