



"Your Yard, Garden & Pet Place!"

## Raising Chickens In Your Backyard

**Breeds** – see Breed Description Sheet

Find out the legality in your town by calling your local Board of Health

**Chelmsford:** Permit required – up to 10 chickens on 40,000 square feet – 50 feet away from abutting property.

### What you will need:

Chick brooder – can be as simple as a cardboard box – draft free – protected from house pets

Pine shavings – do not use newspaper – they will slip and possibly get splayed legs. Change shavings frequently so it does not become damp

Heat Lamp – start out at 90 degrees. Red lamp lights are best to prevent pecking. Be very careful with placement and hanging. The light should be raised every few days as chicks mature.

Feed – Chick Starter or Chick Starter Grower medicated (feed discussion below) there are also organic options

Waterer – always maintain fresh water and clean the shavings out frequently

Chicken Coop – once they are 6 - 8 weeks old and have feathered out then they are ready to go outside

- Adjust the heat lamp height so chicks are not crowded under the lamp (too cold) or all huddled at the opposite side of the brooder away from the heat lamp (too hot).
- Make sure they are all eating and drinking. If not, you can gently place their beaks in the water
- You can bring them outside (closely supervised) if it is warm outside
- Once they are a few weeks old you can make a hole on each side of the box about 4-6 inches high and put a small stick through it. This will give the chicks practice roosting on a pole before they go outside in the coop
- After two weeks you can experiment with some treats such as mealworms, yogurt, chopped up hardboiled eggs. This is also the time you can introduce chick grit to help them digest the new foods. They have very specific protein needs, so their chick feed should be their primary source of food.
- As the chicks grow you can increase the size of their brooder/box
- Raising the waterer up on a piece of wood or a block can help reduce the amount of shavings that end up in the water

### Feed:

#### Medicated vs Non-Medicated

The difference between the medicated and non-medicated is that the medicated starter contains a small amount of an anti-coccidiosis drug, usually amprolium, which is a thiamine blocker used to prevent and treat coccidiosis (it is NOT an antibiotic). Note: chicks that are raised on medicated starter can still get coccidiosis. The dosage is low and is simply added as a preventative, it is not a guarantee that chicks on medicated starter will be immune, they will simply have a lower chance of contracting this disease.

Chick Starter or Chick Starter Grower (medicated) until 8 weeks old  
Chick Starter Grower (non-medicated) until they begin to lay (16 – 24 weeks)  
Layer Crumbles or Pellets once any of the chickens in the flock begin to lay eggs

#### **Treats:**

Meal worms	Sunflower seeds
Chicken Scratch (less than 10% of their diet)	Millet seeds
Fruit – bananas (no skin)	Left overs (only what is edible by humans)
Oatmeal	Cooked eggs
Yogurt	Veggies
Pumpkin/squash	Bread
Cabbage	Veggies from garden
Pasta – fun to watch	

**NO:** potato peels, too much salt, citrus, dried or undercooked beans, avocado skin & pit, raw eggs, candy

#### **Coop:**

3-4 square feet per chicken in the coop and 10 square feet per outside run  
Predator proof – chicken wire on the top of the run and along the base.  
An adequate run  
Ventilation  
Winter - water heater base  
Lights – can be set on a timer for more eggs (mornings only) 14-16 hours of daylight  
Pine shavings  
Diatomaceous Earth as a base in coop and nesting boxes to limit insects and odor  
Perches/roosting posts for sleeping so they do not sleep (and poop) in nesting boxes  
Number of nesting boxes – general rule of thumb is one box for every four chickens  
Heat – not recommended  
Make sure there is adequate shade in the summer

#### **Eggs:**

Eggs have a natural anti-bacterial coating on the shell called the 'bloom'. If soiled, it is best to use a dry cleaning method – a light buff with an abrasive cleaning pad (used ONLY for eggs and nothing else). Any eggs with cracks I dispose of. Use warm water to clean the eggs – cold water will cause the contents of the egg to shrink which creates a vacuum that will pull bacteria into the egg through the porous egg shell. Do not soak in water – just a quick wash and then either air dry or dry off with a paper towel. Once washed they must be refrigerated. No soap – just warm water. An egg that has gone bad will float in a glass of water

- Hens will begin to lay anywhere from 4-6 months of age
- Soft shelled eggs are no cause for concern – add calcium to their diet with oyster shells or crushed egg shells
- Temperature and stress will also affect egg laying
- Broody hens will normally stay broody for approximately 21 days – this is the amount of time it would take eggs to hatch if they were fertile
- Color of the comb is a good indicator that the chicken is close to laying. It will turn bright red.
- Chicken song – many chickens will make quite a lot of noise just before they lay an egg

### **Boredom in the winter:**

Hang suet feeders or attach to fencing

hang cabbage

scatter birdseed on the ground and then cover with leaves

### **Health problems:**

**Pasty butt:** droppings stick to their vents (behind) and clog it up. Soak a paper towel or wash cloth with warm water and try to remove it. If this does not work then rub a little Vaseline or oil (vegetable or olive oil).

**Egg binding/egg bound:** the egg gets stuck in the oviduct and she unable to pass it. Put her in a warm bucket of water – crushed calcium tablets (Rolaids/tums) – Preparation H to take down the swelling

**Egg eating:** plastic golf balls left in nesting boxes, collect eggs frequently or blow out egg contents and fill with mustard

**Lethargic** and not moving around: child's medicine syringe filled with olive oil – something may be caught in their gullet – squirted down their throat.

**Pecking:** chickens will peck another chicken mercilessly if there is an open wound. Blu-Kote spray is the best – it is an antiseptic and is dark blue to mask the red color of the wound. If it is a deep wound, a combination of Blu-Kote and liquid band-aid from the local drugstore will help.

**Worms:** If there are worms in their poop you will need to deworm them with Wazine. Do not eat the eggs for 2 weeks.

A little organic apple cider vinegar in their water is helpful to support their immune system and is rich in vitamins, minerals and trace elements. 3-4 tablespoons per gallon of water

**Molting:** after they have gone through their first winter, the second and all subsequent winters they will molt.

Molting is when they shed their old feathers and grow new ones. During the molt, the chickens will not lay eggs. It takes 2 to 6 months to complete. This is a good time to increase their protein and change their feed temporarily to Feather Fixer.

The first two years the chickens will produce the most eggs - by 5 years old they will lay half as frequently as they did during the first two years.

### **Introducing new chickens to the flock:**

Chicken Math: It is inevitable that you will start out with a certain number of chickens and it will somehow increase. Introducing new chicks to an existing flock is not easy. There is a pecking order – It is the flock's way of keeping order.

There are two methods to do this:

If you have a broody hen, the new chicks can be placed underneath her after nightfall. Or, you could slowly introduce the chicks over several days to the chickens when they are outside of the pen grazing in the yard. When they are ready to go outside full-time you could put netting across part of the coop and the pen/run and move them back and forth in the morning and evening. Within a week to 10 days they will be used to each other.

**Cleaning the Coop:** A thorough cleaning 3 times a year with the ceiling and walls sprayed and scrubbed – early Spring once the snow is gone, mid-summer and Fall before the snow comes. In between, quick total clean outs and diatomaceous earth spread on floors and nesting boxes before fresh shavings are put down. Extreme snow in winter will necessitate fresh layers of diatomaceous earth & shavings being put on top of existing shavings.

### **Resources:**

<https://www.backyardchickens.com/>

Tom Doherty: 104 Providence Road, Westford: 978-392-1254 (takes unwanted/aggressive chickens/roosters)

Questions: [info@chelmsfordagway.com](mailto:info@chelmsfordagway.com)