

Backyard Chickens Fact Sheet

Food and Water

- An egg is 65% water.
- Chickens should have access to clean, fresh water. Allow at least 1-2 cups of water per bird daily.
- Chickens should have access to plenty of food at all times. Allow at least 2 lbs. of food per week for each chicken. Chickens will typically eat more in the winter and less in the summer.
- Chickens are omnivores, which means that they eat both plants and animals.

Eggs

- A rooster is not needed for hens to lay eggs.
- One nest box can be shared by 4-5 hens. Hens lay eggs communally.
- Hens begin laying eggs on average at 20-24 weeks depending on breed and other factors such as daylight, weather conditions, and diet. Some breeds such as the Leghorn begin to lay earlier.
- Hens are most productive when they are under 3 years of age.
- Productive hens can lay 200-300 eggs per year. Examples of high laying hens are Leghorns, Black and Red Sex Link, Rhode Island Reds, Orpington, Plymouth Rock, Barred Rock and others.
- Characteristics
- The body temperature of a mature hen is 105-107 degrees Fahrenheit.
- The average life expectancy of a pet chicken is 10-12 years, but they can live longer.
- Molting is a natural process that chickens go through to renew their feathers. Molting hens temporarily stop laying eggs and may benefit from an increase in dietary protein.

Terminology

- Pullet - Young female
- Hen – Mature female
- Cockerel - Young male
- Rooster – Mature male
- Straight Run – A term used when buying or selling chicks that means mixed pullets and cockerels. Broody – an instinctive condition in hens where the hen begins to sit on a clutch of eggs in order to incubate and hatch them.

Parts of Your Chicken's Home

- Coop – A building where your chickens can sleep and get out of the cold. The coop provides shelter from the elements. Allow 4 square feet of space per bird. Coops should be constructed of wire strong enough so it cannot be torn by raccoons. It is also a good idea to put pavers, tile, brick or wire around the perimeter of the coop so that animals cannot dig under it.
- Protection from wild animals -Chickens will draw all kinds of animals and must have protection from predators such as dogs, raccoons, fox, hawks, coyotes and dogs as they have no defenses. Rat snakes are attracted to eggs. Leaving feed out overnight will draw rodents and will very quickly present a problem.
- Roost – A branch, dowel, or 2X2 board that chickens use to perch at night. Normal chicken behavior is to sleep on a roost. Allow 8-10 inches of linear roosting space per bird.
- Nest Box – A nest box is used by chickens to lay eggs. A nest box should be 12”X12”X14” and contain hay and shavings suitable for nesting material.
- Run – A space used by chickens during the day. This space can be a fenced enclosure or an open space such as a backyard. Allow 8-10 square feet per bird. Ensure that birds have space for normal chicken behaviors such as scratching the earth and dust baths

Web Resources:

<https://posc.tamu.edu/texas-agrilife-poultry-extension-specialists/publications/>
<https://collin.agrilife.org/publications/agriculture>

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