Backyard Chickens
presented by Judy Glattstein
at the 2015 Rutgers Home Gardeners School

Breed of Chickens

Bantam
Standard
Fancy

Leghorns lay white shelled eggs. Excellent layers, mature early, lay well in winter. Rarely broody. Tend to be somewhat flighty, nervous.


Araucana lay blue, green, khaki shelled eggs.

Silkies are very calm, good as pets, great brooders often used to hatch other poultry. Poor egg production.

Definitions

Chick Young chicken, from hatching to feathering out
Pullet Young hen not yet or just beginning to lay eggs at about 4 to 6 months of age
Hen Layer, adult female chicken
Broody Hen intent on hatching eggs. More common in some breeds than others
Cockerel Young rooster
Capon Castrated rooster, raised for meat. Surgical caponizing (done at 2 to 4 weeks of age) is difficult since testes are internal.

Rooster Adult male chicken. Different breeds begin crowing earlier or later - Sicilian Buttercup cockerels can begin to crow at a month old, Fayoumi at five to six weeks. More typically, at 3½ to 5 months. Plan on 6 to 10 hens per rooster.

Fowl Can refer to chicken, duck, goose, turkey, pheasant, or to old non-laying hen used for stew or soup

Chicken Coops

In general, plan on 2 sq. ft. of coop space, 4 sq. ft. of run as a minimum for each standard size bird. Bantams need proportionally less space, heavy breeds need more.

A chicken tractor is a small house and run, often triangular in cross section. It has no bottom and can easily be moved from place to place.

Coop Furnishings

Hens need as nest box. Plan on one box for every three hens.

Chickens also need a roosting area inside the coop.

The pop hole - opening from coop to run - should have a ramp from coop to ground, and a sliding door so chickens can be confined to the coop.

Chicken Feed
Mash  Milled into fine texture | Starter ration until chicks are 6 to 8 weeks old
Crumbles | Grower ration until chicks are 18 weeks old
Pellets  self explanatory | Layer ration after 18 weeks.

Chicks do best with mash, older birds can continue on mash or transition to crumbles or pellets

ScratchCracked corn with other grains such as wheat, oats and rye mixed in. Best if fed in colder weather as scratch is very warming
Grit  Crushed granite in several grades - chick, pullet, layer, turkey. Helps birds grind up food in gizzard. Needed as birds have no teeth.
Oyster Shell  Ground up oyster shell in small pieces, for strong eggshells.

How Much Food?
For 3 standard breed chickens:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starter</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>17 lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grower</td>
<td>6-18</td>
<td>23 lbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Layer</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>30 lbs</td>
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Treats  Fruit, vegetables (cook potato peels first), bread, oatmeal raw or cooked, popcorn (no butter or salt), plain yogurt. Dark green leafy vegetables make dark orange yolks.
Do Not feed raw green potato skins, avocado skin or pits, orange peels, banana skins, tea bags, dry or undercooked beans, chocolate, salty items, raw eggs (may lead to chickens eating their own eggs)

Water  Important! Clean fresh water must always be available

About Eggs

Inside the shell all eggs are the same. It is only for aesthetic reasons that we choose chickens which lay white, brown, or green / blue / khaki shelled eggs. When they first begin to lay pullets may produce peculiar eggs - small, empty, leathery. With a little practice they get it right. Egg production is higher with longer days of Spring, fewer in winter and irregular in hot weather.

Some breeds lay more prolifically than others. Very prolific hens (these are referred to as ROP, meaning record of performance) will lay 200 or more eggs / year. One hundred to 150 eggs / year is considered moderate, and there are breeds that lay just 50 eggs / year or even less.

Fresh eggs sink to the bottom of a jar of water. Somewhat older eggs will stand on end. Stale eggs float. Eggs are good to eat for 3 to 4 weeks after laying. To preserve eggs they may be frozen – take out of shell, beat with a pinch of salt or sugar, then freeze. Label with quantity (1, 2, or 3 eggs) and whether intended for sweet or savory dishes. Note: baked goods that rely on eggs for “lift” may not rise as well as with fresh eggs.
Regulations

Check with your township’s zoning board before you begin keeping chickens. Some communities will allow you to keep 3 to 6 hens. Most do not allow roosters. There may be regulations about where to site the coop in relation to your home or well. Keeping chickens for your own use may be permitted but selling eggs might not. That said, people are happily - and legally - keeping chickens in the city! But asking first solves problems before they arise.

Suggested Reading


