

Consider adding a little bit of diatomaceous earth to the hen house bedding to prevent mites. There are also additives you can use to diminish the smells between coop cleanings.

When caring for a coop, you can choose to clean it out each week by removing all the bedding and then adding more. Or, you could use the deep litter method to maintain the coop. The deep litter method has you add another inch of bedding every week to cover the existing bedding. If there is a smell, you should add more bedding. You can also add clay or a deodorizer to prevent moisture accumulation and smells. Completely clean out the coop in the fall and spring, then start with fresh litter. In cooler climates, the deep litter method has the added benefit of helping to keep the coop warm during the winter. Some chicken owners prefer to use the deep litter method only in the winter and clean their coop every week during the warmer weather.

**Nesting Boxes:** For every four laying hens, one nesting box should be provided. Most hens will lay their eggs in the provided box, but you should also beware that some hens will hide their eggs in unusual places. Most hens will lay one egg a day, so check your nesting box every day to prevent broody chickens. During winter time, some hens will lay fewer eggs. Some people add some ceramic eggs to the nesting box to prevent egg eating and encourage regular laying in the nesting box.

**Roost:** At night, many chickens like to perch on a branch to sleep. To prevent foot cramps and help your chickens be as comfortable as possible, look for a natural branch at least two inches in diameter to be a roost. Each chicken will need at least 10 inches of perch length.

**Feeders and Waterers:** Feeders and waterers should be approximately six to eight inches off the ground to prevent your chickens from polluting their food and water when they scratch around the area. Chicken owners may hang their feeders and waterers, or they may place them on a couple of stacked bricks.

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## STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Muddies are happy to help you discuss the best ways to care for chickens. Veterinarians who care for poultry can help you navigate any health challenges with your birds. We also like Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens by Gail Damerow and Keep Chickens! Tending Small Flocks in Cities, Suburbs and Other Small Spaces by Barbara Kilarski for more information about raising chickens.

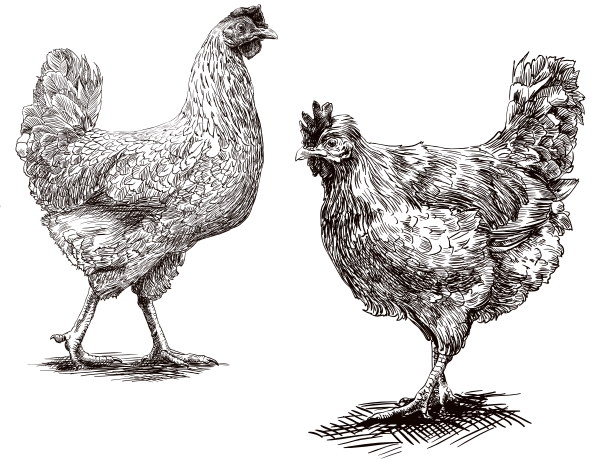
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A short guide to

# THE CARE AND FEEDING OF CHICKENS

Backyard chickens are fun pets with unique personalities. Many municipalities allow chickens in suburban areas, and we know plenty of chicken owners who care for mini flocks. Hens also will lay nutritious eggs, and chickens eat many common kitchen scraps, which makes them highly useful pets. Chickens are social creatures, so for this reason, Mud Bay highly recommends having at least two.



## FEEDING CHICKENS

When a chick is hatched, it still has enough food in the remnants of the yolk to live for up to three days. But once you have a chick, you should immediately offer each bird some starter feed and fresh water. Pet chickens should eat starter diets for eight weeks that contain at least 20 percent protein.

Some people like to use a medicated chick feed when they first get their chicks. Medicated feed contains amprolium that is used to help prevent coccidiosis infections during a chick's first few weeks of life. Some chicken owners use it, while others rightly point out that the risk of chicks getting sick is greatly diminished if you have a small flock. If you choose to use a medicated feed, discontinue its use after two months.

After eight weeks, your chickens should transition into a grower or developer diet. These diets should have more than 18 percent protein. When your hens begin laying eggs, transition them to eating a layer diet, which has 16 percent protein and enough calcium to support egg shell production. Various chicken breeds start laying at different times, but most hens start laying around five months of age.

Roosters can follow the same eating schedule as laying hens. Although laying feed does have higher calcium levels,



roosters can safely eat it. Of course, if you keep your roosters and hens separate, or only have roosters, you can feed them grower or developer feed for their entire lives.

All chickens will also need free access to grit to aid in digestion. A chicken will swallow small pieces of grit and store the grit in the gizzard to help digest her food. Baby chicks will need chick grit because adult grit may be too big. Laying chickens will also benefit from free access to oyster shells to supplement calcium and maintain strong egg shells.



## WHOLE GRAIN FEEDS VS. PELLETED FEED

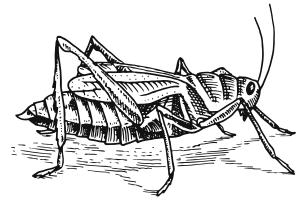
To prevent nutritional imbalances, when feeding whole grain feeds, you should make sure your chickens eat all the food before giving them more and always scoop from the bottom. This step prevents them from eating their favorite bits out of the food and avoiding a balanced diet. If your chickens don't eat all the food, you can try adding some moisture to the food or fermenting the food and feeding to the birds in a trough feeder.

Pelleted chicken food is easier to feed because every pellet has the same nutritional profile. The downside is it's a more processed food.

## TREATS AND TOYS FOR CHICKENS

Providing scratch for chickens during the day provides your chickens mental stimulation while acknowledging a chicken's instinct to forage. Scratch can be fed daily as a supplement. In the winter, you might want to consider feeding your chickens corn, which is a higher carbohydrate treat that will help your birds stay warm in the coop. During warm summer months, you might want to avoid corn and try oats instead.

Chickens are omnivores and will happily eat many scrap foods. Lean proteins, vegetables and fruits are all good things to give chickens in moderation. *However, citrus fruits, bones, garlic, onions, raw potato skins, avocado skins or pits, undercooked beans and spoiled meat should never be fed to your chickens.*

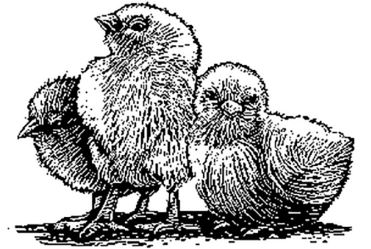


Outdoor chickens love to hunt for insects. For times when insects are in short supply, consider occasionally providing mealworms to your chickens. Most birds love this special treat.

Chickens like any other animals like mental stimulation. Offering them toys to play with can help them amuse themselves and avoid getting into mischief.

## BUILDING A BROODER

If you buy day-old chicks and don't have a hen to mother them, you'll need a brooder. You'll need one square foot of space per chick, and many people use large plastic totes, cardboard boxes or aquariums for their brooders. The sides of the brooder should be approximately 24 inches or more to prevent the chicks from hopping out. Brooders should be in a coop, garage or even your living room to keep them safe from the elements.



The bottom of every brooder should have several inches of plain wood shavings, a waterer and a feeder full of starter crumbles. You should also place a heat lamp in the box that will keep the chicks warm. The heat lamp should keep half the brooder about 95 degrees for the first week of your chick's life. Then, you should drop the temperature five degrees every week. Chicks should be able to get away from the heat lamp if they get too hot, or they will overheat within hours. Every brooder needs a spot not heated by the lamp in case the chicks get too hot. If your chicks avoid the heat lamp, move the heat lamp several inches away from the brooder to lower the temperature. When your six-to-eight-week-old chicks have all their feathers, they are ready to move into a coop.

## CREATING A COOP FIT FOR A CHICKEN

While there are many chicken coops and plans available, it's essential that whatever place you choose meets your chicken's basic needs. Chickens are unique in the sense that they are highly susceptible to drafts, but they also need plenty of air movement to prevent respiratory diseases.

A chicken coop should protect chickens from predators from all sides, as well as the floor and roof. A chicken run if your chickens are completely free-range, should also protect the chickens from danger from hawks, burrowing animals, and neighborhood dogs and cats.

**Size:** Each chicken needs approximately four square feet of space in the coop if she can roam around outside the coop during the day. If she must stay in the coop all the time, she'll need 10 square feet of space.

**Bedding:** Cedar shavings and other beddings with aromatic oils or phenols can create respiratory ailments in chickens. Look for plain wood shavings and spread them at least three to four inches deep in the bottom of the coop.

