

BACKYARD CHICKENS BOOK PACKAGE

THE BACKYARD CHICKENS HANDBOOK



WHAT YOU
NEED TO KNOW
TO RAISE
BACKYARD CHICKENS

THE BACKYARD CHICKENS BREED GUIDE



M. ANDERSON

2 BOOKS

**Backyard Chickens Book Package: The Backyard Chickens Handbook
and The Backyard Chickens Breed Guide by M. Anderson**

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Book 1

The Backyard Chickens Handbook: What You Need to Know to Raise Backyard Chickens by M. Anderson

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to my loving wife, who's had to deal with my obsession with backyard chickens, survival skills and homesteading for many long years. I love you to death sweetie. Thanks for being so understanding.

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What are Backyard Chickens?

Backyard chickens are small flocks of chickens that are kept by people looking to raise birds for meat, eggs or both. Most backyard chicken enthusiasts keep a flock of less than ten birds. It's estimated that hundreds of thousands of people across the United States keep backyard flocks, often in violation of local laws and ordinances.

These small flocks of chickens date back to a simpler time when people had to raise their own food or starve.

While it may seem quite distant, it wasn't that long ago that grocery stores where you could go buy any food you wanted simply didn't exist. People who wanted eggs and chicken meat either had to raise the birds themselves or barter for them by trading other goods or services. This led many people to raise small flocks of chickens in order to have a constant source of eggs and chicken meat.

Raising chickens dates back to a simpler time, where food was raised and harvested sustainably. Fast food didn't exist and processed food hadn't been invented. Our forefathers would be shocked to see what passes for food today and they'd be sickened to find out what's in it. Those with backyard flocks know just how bad the eggs and birds sold commercially have become. Once you try backyard eggs and chicken, you'll never want to go back to stuff sold in stores. There's really that big of a difference.

Terms You Need to Know

If you're new to the world of backyard chickens, the language and terms used can be rather confusing. Here are the terms you need to know in order to fit right in.

Backyard Chickens

Chickens grown in an urban setting, usually in a person's backyard.

Bantam

Bantam birds are smaller versions of normal chickens. They're ideal for those who are short on space. The eggs they lay are edible, but are smaller than normal chicken eggs. There are bantam versions of many of the most popular breeds.

Beak

The hard portion of a chicken's mouth.

Bedding

The material that's spread in the bottom of the coop to insulate the floor and wick away moisture.

Biddy

Another name for a hen.

Bloom

The protective coating covering a freshly-laid egg.

Breeder

Mature chicken used for fertilized eggs.

Broiler

A chicken that is raised for the sole purpose of eventually killing it and eating it. Broilers are usually plain white birds that grow to 4 to 5 pounds in 6 weeks, at

which time they're harvested for meat.

Brooder

When baby chicks are born, they're moved into a brooder, which is a box or container that's kept warm and cozy until they develop feathers and are able to go out on their own.

Broody

A hen is said to have gone broody when her maternal instinct takes over and she has an uncontrollable desire to sit on a nest full of eggs. Broody hens will stop laying eggs until they're no longer broody.

Capon

A castrated rooster, typically raised for meat. Caponization happens after the rooster is six weeks of age and can be done surgically or through use of chemicals. Capons are calmer and less aggressive than normal roosters, and the meat matures differently. It's said to be of the highest quality and tastes different than that of normal chicken.

Candling

Using light to check an egg to make sure it's developing properly.

Cannibalism

The tendency of chickens to peck at one another's flesh and eggs.

Clutch

A group of eggs. The eggs a broody hen sits on is often referred to as her clutch.

Cock

A male chicken.

Cockerel

An adolescent male rooster.

Comb

The red piece of skin that stands up on top of a chicken's head.

Coop

A chicken house.

Diatomaceous Earth

Also known as DE. This is a powdery substance that actually isn't earth. It's made up of finely ground fossils and is used to kill parasites and mites, both internally and externally.

Dusting

Takes place when a bird covers itself in dust in an effort to prevent mites and parasites.

Hatch

A chick hatches when it leaves the egg.

Hen

A female chicken that has reached laying age.

Feed

The stuff your chickens eat.

Fryer

Young meat chicken.

Egg Tooth

The sharp portion of a chick's beak. It's used to chip away at the egg when the chick is ready to hatch.

Fertile Egg

A fertile egg is one that's laid after a rooster mates with the hen who lays it. Fertile eggs are the only eggs that can be hatched into chicks.

Free-Range

Chickens that are allowed to come and go as they please. Free-range chickens have access to a coop, but don't need a run because they're able to roam about your entire yard.

Heritage Chicken

A breed of chicken that has withstood the test of time. Heritage chickens are recognized by the American Poultry Association.

Incubator

A device used to keep chicken eggs warm until they hatch.

Laying Hen

A female chicken raised to lay eggs.

Litter

Another term for bedding.

Meat Bird

A chicken raised to be harvested for meat.

Molting

The shedding of feathers once a year.

Nesting Box

A box (or series of boxes) that are included as part of the coop. These boxes are where the hens lay their eggs.

Pecking Order

The chain of command in a flock. The chicken at the top of the pecking order

dominates the rest of the chickens, while the chicken at the bottom is pushed around by the rest of the flock.

Pipping

Baby chicks are said to be pipping when they break out of their shells and hatch.

Plumage

The feathers covering a chicken.

Pullet

A young female chicken.

Roaster

A type of meat chicken. Roasters are larger than broilers.

Rooster

A full-grown male chicken. Roosters are illegal to own in a lot of neighborhoods because they tend to be loud and aggressive.

Run

The outdoor area that's attached to the coop. The run is fenced in to keep the chickens in and predators out.

Sexing

Checking the gender of chicks.

Show Bird

A chicken that is raised as a pet, with the intent of entering it into competitions where the quality of the bird's features are judged.

Sterile

Unable to reproduce.

Tractor

A mobile coop, designed to be moved around in your yard. Tractors allow your chickens to scratch around and find bugs and plant matter in different areas of your yard, while keeping them safe from predators.

Vent

The opening at the bottom of the chicken through which eggs are laid. Chickens also eliminate waste through their vent.

Why Raise Chickens?

Chickens are hardy birds that are easy to raise.

They can be raised in almost any normal climate humans live in, regardless of how hot or cold it gets. All they really require is food, water and a place to sleep at night.

Raising chickens allows us to reconnect, at least partially, with the old way of living our ancestors enjoyed. It provides us with a healthy and inexpensive source of food that doesn't require running to the local grocery store or restaurant.

It also allows us to teach our children a sustainable lifestyle. Animal husbandry and chicken keeping is somewhat of a lost art, and it's imperative we pass this knowledge on to the next generation. Should something happen where our families can't rely on commercial food sources, keeping chickens and other animals is going to be a critical skill to have.

Commercial chickens are often raised in huge factories, where the birds are stacked on top of one another in tiny cages. Their beaks are burnt off to prevent them from pecking one another and little attention is paid to how sanitary and safe the conditions are. Chemicals—including arsenic compounds—are fed to factory birds to kill off parasites and to force them to produce more eggs. Some of these chemicals make it into the final products sold in stores.

Even the farms claiming to allow their birds to range freely aren't what you'd expect. Sure, the birds are allowed to run free, but it's more often than not in large indoor dirt pens packed full of thousands of other birds running around in their own feces. Not exactly what you picture when you think of free-range chickens, is it?

Raising your own chickens allows you to get your eggs and your meat from a sustainable and healthy source.

When you raise your own birds, you know where your chickens and eggs came from and you know what they've been fed. You also know no pesticides and antibiotics have been used on them. This alone should be reason enough to start raising your own chickens.

If you aren't sold yet, the next item should seal the deal.

Eggs from pasture-fed free-range birds are better for you than commercial eggs. One study by Mother Earth News showed free-range eggs have as much as one third less cholesterol and less saturated fat than conventional eggs. They also

contained more vitamins and Omega-3 fatty acids.

Chickens are Fun

Most backyard chicken keepers will tell you chickens make for great pets. They're good with kids and are fun for the whole family.

Chickens have individual personalities and can be very entertaining.

Some chickens will run out to greet you when enter the yard. Others will hang back and wait for you to come to them. Some are wild and crazy, while others are shy and reserved. They can be trained to walk on a leash and many breeds can be safely handled by children.

Kids love to play with and chase chickens around the yard. Just be careful not to let your kids get too attached to chickens you plan on eating. It'll be a long day when you tell your kids it's time to kill their favorite bird and eat it for dinner. I let my kids play with the mating roosters and laying hens because they'll be around for a while. They generally steer clear of the broilers because they know they're going to end up on the table in a couple months.

That said, chickens make great pets—and when was the last time a pet provided food for the table?

Chickens are fun to own and raise, and it's rewarding to harvest eggs from your own brood of laying hens. It's no wonder so many people have their own flocks of backyard chickens.

The Cost of Raising Chickens

Chickens are one of the most inexpensive animals to raise, but they're still going to cost you a bit of money, especially up front. This section examines what it's going to cost you to start raising chickens in the most inexpensive manner possible.

Anything above and beyond this is going to cost extra.

Chicken Coop: \$500 to \$700

The first thing you're going to have to buy is a coop—or at least the supplies and tools to build it. This can run you anywhere from a couple hundred bucks to into the thousands, depending on how big your coop is and what features you want it to have. Let's say the average backyard chicken owner has 7 birds.

You're going to need a coop that's big enough to hold your birds. Let's say the average coop costs around \$700 to buy and \$400 to build. You can lower the cost if you've got scrap wood lying around you can use to build the coop.

Feeders and Waterers: \$10 to \$20 each

You're going to need a feeder and waterer for your coop. You can buy good ones for around \$20 apiece, or you can make them yourself out of a 5 gallon bucket glued to a round metal pan for around \$10 bucks each. Your call.

Food: \$10 to \$30 a month

Food is going to be your biggest expense. It runs anywhere from \$10 to \$30 for a 50-pound sack, which will last you just over a month if you keep 7 to 10 chickens. You can cut down on food costs by letting your chickens free-range for a while each day and giving them table scraps.

Bedding: \$10 to \$50

Bedding costs can really add up if you use expensive bedding and change it frequently. If you use sand, you can probably buy enough to last you all year for less than \$50 bucks. Seek out cheap sources of bedding and avoid paying full price at home improvement stores.

Grit: \$5 to \$10 a bag

A single bag of grit goes a long way, as your chickens aren't going to need much of it to aid with digestion. Throw a handful or two into your coop or run once a month.

Incubator: \$50

This is only a necessity if you plan on hatching your own eggs. You can get an incubator capable of holding 40+ large chicken eggs for less than \$50. This should more than meet the needs of the backyard chicken breeder.

Chicks: \$1 to \$3 per chick

The cost per chick depends on the type of chick you're buying. Broilers can be bought for as little as a buck apiece, while certain Heritage breeds can cost a small fortune. When you're first starting out, you don't want to pay more than a few bucks per chick.

Brooder: \$20 to \$30

You can make a brooder out of a cardboard box, which can be found for free almost anywhere. The only expense is going to be for the hooded lamp and the bulb, which will run you between \$20 and \$30.

Chick Food: \$12 per 50 lb. bag

This much chick food will last you two to three months. Be sure to talk to the feed store in advance, because some feed stores don't carry it and will have to order it when you want it.

Total Cost: \$625 to \$900+

At a bare minimum, you're looking at around \$625 to get started. It's probably going to cost you more than that, especially once you start looking into nicer stuff for your coop. Automatic doors, lights on timers and automatic waterers and feeders are all nice to have, but they all add up to extra cost.

If you're getting into raising chickens because you want to save money, you're probably going to be disappointed in the amount of money you have to spend to

get started and to maintain your coop. On the other hand, if you're in it for the fresh eggs and the pleasure of owning and maintaining your own source of food, you're going to enjoy having a flock of chickens.

Breeds of Chickens

There are so many breed of chickens that it can be a bit overwhelming when you first start shopping around.

The first thing you should take into consideration is the type of breed you want and whether you want laying chickens, meat chickens or dual-purpose chickens.

Laying chickens are bred to lay eggs. Meat chickens are bred to be eaten. Dual-purpose chickens are bred to both lay eggs and be eaten. Dual-purpose hens are usually kept as laying hens, while dual-purpose cockerels are harvested for food.

Heritage breeds are pure-bred chickens that are commonly used as show chickens. Some Heritage breeds are bred to be great laying hens. They typically cost more than the other types of birds because they've been bred to have certain qualities people are looking for.

Hybrid chickens are the most common type of chicken sold today. They're a cross between various breeds and have been bred to be resistant to disease. You'll find a lot of hybrids that have been bred to lay large numbers of quality eggs. One problem you may run into with hybrids is they can be difficult to breed. You'll often get chicks that are inconsistent with their parents.

Bantam chickens are bred to be small in stature. They are a good choice for those who have limited space and want to fit as many chickens as they can into that space. Some of the more popular breeds of chicken have smaller bantam versions available.

There are three basic classes of chicken:

- American.

- Asiatic.

- Mediterranean.

American class birds are known for being good egg-layers. Common American birds include the following:

- American Dominiques.

- Delaware.

- Javas.

Jersey Giant.

Plymouth Rocks.

Rhode Island Reds and Whites.

Wyandottes.

Asiatic class birds are larger birds that are usually raised as meat chickens. Common Asiatic breeds include the following:

Brahmas (also good laying birds).

Cochins.

Langshams.

Mediterranean chickens tend to be good egg layers. The leghorn breeds are some of the best layers you'll find. The following breeds of Mediterranean chickens are sold by many breeders:

Ancona.

Andalusian.

Leghorns.

Minorcas.

Spanish.

You may come across sex-link birds for sell. These birds are different colors based on what sex they are. This makes it easy to tell when you're getting roosters and when you're getting hens. You can specify what you want with other breeds of chickens, but they're usually only guaranteed to be 90% accurate. This means one of every ten birds you purchase as a hen is going to turn out to be a rooster.

You can rehome your extra roosters, sell them or eat them. Roosters aren't allowed in many residential areas and cities, so you're going to have to get rid of them when they start crowing. You may be able to hide a chicken coop. You won't be able to hide one with a rooster or two in it.

Egg-Laying Chickens

Eggs are by far the most common reason people raise backyard chickens.

When you crack open your first backyard chicken egg, you're probably going to be surprised by what you find. If your chickens have been properly fed and cared for, the shell will be thicker than that of the eggs you get from the store and the yolk will be a darker color.

The egg is probably going to taste better, too.

Most backyard chicken keepers will tell you there's a noticeable difference between the taste of fresh eggs and those you buy from the store. Part of this difference can be attributed to the time an egg sits around before you buy it. The rest can be attributed to the health and diet of your backyard chickens. Generally speaking, the more varied the diet of your birds, the better the eggs will taste.

Chickens start laying eggs around 5 months of age, give or take a month or two. If you have 6 month old chickens that aren't laying eggs, don't worry. All is not lost. Some chickens may not begin laying eggs until the next Spring after they've been born.

Chickens can live into the double digits and are capable of laying eggs well into their teens. The number of eggs they lay decreases as they age and older chickens may stop laying altogether.

Most common laying breeds lay an egg every 24 to 28 hours. For every ten hens you have, you'll get somewhere in the range of 6 to 8 eggs per day.

You don't need a rooster present to get your hens to lay eggs. They'll lay them no matter what. The only time you need a rooster around is if you want eggs that are fertilized. Roosters are only a necessity if you want to hatch chicks.

The best laying hens I've found are the Rhode Island breeds and the Leghorn breeds. Light Sussex, Ancona and Minorca chickens are also good layers.

Meat and Dual-Purpose Chickens

Meat chickens are chickens raised to eventually end up on the dinner table. They grow fast and mature quickly. Many of the most popular meat breeds can be harvested in 6 to 8 weeks, at which time they'll be around 4 to 5 pounds.

The most common type of meat chicken is the Cornish X chicken, also known as the broiler.

This is the chicken you normally find in the stores, but you aren't going to recognize it as such when you eat it. The chicken sold in stores is often pumped full of saline and other additives to make the meat tender and to add weight to it. Fresh broilers harvested at home don't have the additives and taste much better.

Dual-purpose chickens are good layers and are good on the dinner table. These breeds are a good choice for those looking for both meat and eggs.

In addition to Cornish X chickens, the following breeds of chicken are good meat birds:

Cornish. These meaty birds look small, but have large breasts, making them a favorite amongst breast-lovers and those who prefer white meat.

Delaware. These birds don't grow to large sizes, but mature quickly and are good dual-purpose birds.

Dorking. Dorking chickens are large birds that can grow as big as 10 to 11 pounds. They're considered good table fare.

Easter Egg Chickens. "Easter Egg" chickens lay blue eggs. Some are able to lay other colors as well.

Jersey Giants. These birds can grow as big as 13 to 14 pounds. They're good meat birds, but grow slower than other meat chickens because they spend the first couple months of development putting on bone mass to support their weight.

Marans. These dual-purpose birds are good for both meat and eggs. They lay brown eggs that vary in shade. They grow up to 9 pounds and are said to be delicious dinner fare.

Plymouth Rock. This breed has been around since the Pilgrims came over on the Mayflower. They are a great dual-purpose bird that lays eggs and can be harvested for meat.

Sussex. There are a number of Sussex breeds of chicken available. They are good dual-purpose chickens capable of laying 200+ eggs a year.

Preparation

You're going to want to do a little research before you start buying supplies and chickens.

The first thing you're going to need to look into is local laws and ordinances regarding raising chickens.

A number of cities have restrictive laws on the books that limit where you can raise chickens and how many chickens you can own. There are laws that tell you how many birds you can have, how far coops have to be from residential dwellings and whether or not you can own roosters.

You don't want to unintentionally break any of these laws, as the fines can be steep and you might end up out the cost of your coop and your chickens if you ultimately have to get rid of them.

Neighbors can get a little grouchy about backyard chickens, especially when roosters that crow in the morning are involved. If you decide to go against local ordinances and have more chickens than the law allows, it's a good idea to talk to your neighbors and bribe them with eggs. Even then, you run the risk of someone getting angry and turning you in or a new neighbor coming along that can't stand the crowing.

All Cooped Up

It's rarely a good idea to let backyard chickens roam free, unless you have a huge yard. It's best to fence them in or keep them in a chicken tractor, which is a coop that can be moved around the yard to allow your birds access to insects and plant matter.

You can buy premade coops, you can follow coop design plans or you can design and build your own custom coop. There are a number of books and websites that lay out design plans. You can find a bunch of them for free at backyardchickens.com.

Keeping Predators Out

Your coop and the fence around your coop is your first line of defense against predators.

A good fence around your coop area will keep your chickens in and most predators out. Adding an electric fence will be more costly, but will keep the larger predators away from your birds. Make sure there aren't any holes in your coop into which smaller predators can squeeze. Rats and mice can fit into a hole the size of a half dollar and they'll wreak havoc on your chickens. They'll eat your eggs and your feed, and packs of larger rats have been known to jump on and kill small chickens, which they proceed to eat.

Hardware mesh works well to keep the smaller predators out. Use a heavier gage of mesh, because rats can chew right through the light stuff. You also need to monitor the wood areas of your coop, because predators may chew their way through. Patch up any holes you find. Just be careful not to trap the predator *inside* the coop.

Don't forget attacks from above.

You can either fence in or cover the top of your coop area or you can string braided fishing line back and forth. Birds of prey will be able to see the braided line and won't attempt to dive at your chickens. Raccoons, rats and other animals have no problem climbing over fences, so make sure the roof of your coop is secure.

You're also going to want to secure the floor from attacks from below. Predators have been known to burrow their way into a coop from a distance. You can lay down wire mesh on the floor, pour concrete flooring or you can dig the walls into the ground to help keep burrowing predators out.

Smart predators like raccoons can open simple latches. If a 5-year old kid can

open, a raccoon can get into it as well. You need to use locks that are difficult to open. Strong magnets can be added for an additional layer of security.

Space Requirements

Your coop should allow for at least 3 square feet of space for each chicken you plan on living in it. Your fenced in run should allow for at least 7 square feet of space per bird. What this means is a ten-chicken flock is going to need 30-square feet of coop space and 70 square feet of run space.

You're going to have to provide adequate roosting space as well.

Each bird is going to need at least 6 inches of roosting space. You can hang 2x4's across the coop with the 4" side facing up to be used as roosts. Just make sure you provide adequate support to hold the weight of your chickens. 12 chickens on a single roost can weigh as much as 120 pounds. That's a lot of weight being put on a single roost. Roosting poles should be the highest structure in the coop. If not, chickens will roost on anything that's higher.

Keep in mind these guideline are for average-sized chickens. If you have larger breeds, you're going to need more space.

If your chickens don't have enough space, you're going to have all sorts of problems. Bullying and pecking can take place, and your birds will be more aggressive toward one another. Plan for as big of a coop as you can reasonable afford. If you can't afford a larger coop, plan to have fewer birds. You'll be happier in the end, and your birds will be happier and healthier.

Automatic Doors

Here's something most people don't think of.

Your chickens are going to be on a schedule. They'll enter and exit the coop at a specific time every day. Interruptions to that schedule disrupt your chicken's natural cycle.

Not only does this make your chickens uncomfortable, it can be downright dangerous. Say you're out and about and forget to come home and close your chicken's coop at 8:00PM, which is the normal time they head in for the evening. You're out with a friend, and the two of you decide to go out and have a few drinks. This leads to a couple more drinks, and you don't get home until midnight—to find your coop has been invaded by a raccoon, which entered through the door you left wide open and killed all of your birds.

An automatic door closer would have solved this problem. Set the door to close automatically 15 minutes after the time your chickens head into the coop

for the night, and you can be sure your birds are locked away safely even on those nights you can't be there to close the coop yourself.

Nest Boxes

If you're breeding chickens because you want eggs, you're going to want to include at least one nest box for every 4 hens you own. These boxes fit one hen per box and should provide adequate space for the hen to lie down and lay an egg. Add some straw to each box to make the hen more comfortable.

To make life easier on you, try to provide easy access to the nesting boxes, so you can get in and collect the eggs without having to be a contortionist. You can thank me for this tip later.

When it's time to harvest eggs, all you have to do is check the nesting boxes and the eggs will be right there where you want them to be. Well, that's usually the case. Sometimes hens decide to do their own thing and lay eggs in other places, so keep an eye out for stray eggs in places you wouldn't expect them.

I had one hen who continuously laid eggs right in the middle of the coop. No amount of coaxing would get her to lay them anywhere else. I ended up giving her to a friend, who said she started laying her eggs in a nesting box in his coop. There must have been something about my nesting boxes she didn't care for.

Lighting

While most climates don't require that you heat your coop, you're going to want to have lights on automatic timers in the coop. Setting the timers to make sure the coop is lit for 17 hours a day will go a long way toward making sure hens lay eggs year round.

Ventilation

No matter what type of coop you have, you're going to want it to be well-ventilated. Even in cold climates, you're going to need air vents that are open to the outside.

Chicken poop contains ammonia, and allowing the fumes to build up inside the coop can cause respiratory problems in your birds. Chickens don't pee, so their poop also has a lot of water. Inadequate venting lets the humidity build up in your coop, which can also cause health issues for your chickens.

You're going to want at least a square foot of vent area for every 12 feet of coop area. That's the bare minimum you need and having more ventilation isn't going to hurt, as long as you can close it off to keep the weather out.

Cover your vents with screening to keep predators out.

Make your vents so they're able to be opened and closed. You can close a few of them in the winter to ensure your coop doesn't get too cold. You can open more vents in the summer to make sure your coop doesn't get too hot.

The vent covers should be built with a gasket around them to prevent cold drafts from getting in during the winter. You can also prevent cold drafts by keeping your vents up high open and shutting the vents you have down low. Having open vents at the bottom and top of the coop will create drafts in the coop. This could be a good thing in the heat of the summer, but isn't ideal in the winter. Chickens can handle extreme cold, but not if the cold is accompanied by a draft.

In areas that get extremely hot in the summer, you might want to make one of your walls removable. You can take the wall down during the summer and put it back up in the winter. Screen off the open wall space to keep predators out.

Litter

Litter is the stuff you use to cover the floor of your chicken coop. It helps absorb the extra moisture in the coop and keeps the ammonia in chicken poop from stinking up the coop.

The following types of litter can be used in your coop:

Rice Hulls

Rice hulls are a great dust-free source of chicken litter. It works well as compost and is inexpensive if you can find a good source.

Sand

Sand is a popular bedding material because it's inexpensive and easy to keep clean. If you decide to use sand, get the coarse sand that's full of little pebbles. The fine sand can float around in the air and cause respiratory problems for you and your birds. Change your sand frequently because it has a tendency to get ground down. Once it's ground down, it can float around.

When you use coarse sand as bedding, you don't have to provide grit for your chickens. They'll eat a few of the grains of sand, which will help them digest their food faster and more efficiently.

Shredded Paper or Cardboard

Shredded paper or chopped cardboard can be used as chicken litter. Shredded paper doesn't work as well as cardboard because it tends to get wet and mat up. Chopped cardboard is a better choice because it's able to absorb more water than paper. It composts quickly and chickens seem to like it.

Straw

Straw is an inexpensive source of bedding material for chickens. It has to be replaced frequently because of its propensity for absorbing liquids, but it's got the job done for thousands of years. The upside to using straw is it works well when you remove it from your coop and add it to your compost bin. It breaks down quickly and makes good compost.

Wood chips

Wood chips are my personal favorite litter. The wood shavings keep the smell down and absorb some of the ammonia, keeping your coop smelling fresh. The best wood chips are pine chips. Steer clear of hardwood chips, as they can cause respiratory problems in chickens.

I use a deep litter method, where I lay a 5-inch layer of the chips down once a year. I turn the chips over once a week and add a sprinkling of new wood chips over the top.

Hatching and Raising Chicks

There are a couple ways you can easily hatch your own chicks. Which way you choose is up to you. It depends on how much control you want over the situation and how much work you want to do.

The fertility rate for eggs varies widely. Anywhere from 60% to 90% hatch rate is considered normal. If none of your eggs hatch, they either weren't fertilized correctly or conditions weren't right to promote the development of the embryo into a chick.

Hatching Chicks

The first way to hatch and raise chicks is let a hen go broody and let her sit on fertilized eggs. A broody hen will sit on her eggs (or other hen's eggs, for that matter) all day long, only taking a break to eat and drink once a day. You can tell when a hen has gone broody because she'll spend most of the day in the nesting box sitting on eggs and will resist any attempts by you to get at the eggs she's sitting on.

If you have a rooster that breeds the chickens in your coop, you can get fertilized eggs from your chickens. If not, you'll have to buy fertilized eggs.

The good thing about broody hens is they don't discriminate when it comes to the eggs they sit on. You can take a hen's unfertilized eggs and replace them with fertilized eggs and it doesn't seem to bother her a bit. She'll continue sitting on the eggs like she laid them. I've seen chicken eggs replaced with other breeds of chickens and even other breeds of birds to good effect.

You're going to want to be able to tell unfertilized eggs apart from the fertile eggs your broody hen is sitting on. I've heard of people marking them with paint or with a black marker, but I'm always too worried about the chemicals getting into the egg and harming the chick to use this method. I use a number 1 pencil and mark a line around each fertile egg. That way, I can identify any unfertile eggs that get added to the mix and get them out of the nesting box.

It's possible to let more than one hen go broody at the same time to maximize your hatch, but you need to be careful. Broody hens can get a bit touchy and may fight over eggs. One broody hen might steal fertile eggs from another broody hen. They've also been known to try to steal chicks when they hatch. The fights can get pretty ugly, and you could end up with broken eggs and wounded chickens. If you do decide to let more than one hen go broody, make sure your hens have plenty of space between them.

Your best bet might be to separate your broody hens from the flock, give them a quiet, dark place where they can sit on their eggs do their thing alone. This will allow you to have multiple broody hens at the same time without any of the associated problems. I've heard stories from people who say they've had broody hens work together in the same nesting box or right by one another, but I've never been able to coax broody hens into getting along.

You're less likely to lose eggs if you separate your broody hens from the flock. Be sure to put them back with the flock once they hatch their chicks. This will allow the chicks to integrate into the flock from an early age.

It takes 21 to 23 days for a fertilized egg to hatch. This means you'll lose your broody hen from your egg production for 21 days because broody hens don't usually lay eggs, plus you'll also lose her for the time it takes her to raise the chicks she hatches.

After the chicks hatch, place a tray with starter feed and a small water container near the nest. The mother hen will cover showing the chicks where to get food and water. Letting a broody hen hatch and raise chickens is one of the best ways to add new chickens to your flock. They'll grow up in the flock and will be more likely to be accepted into it with little fanfare.

If you're raising chickens that don't go broody, or you want more control over the process, you can incubate fertile eggs yourself. You can buy fertile eggs or you can add a rooster to your flock to get the job done naturally (if your city allows it).

You're going to need an incubator in order to keep fertilized eggs at the right temperature to develop and hatch. You can make an incubator using heat lamps and a thermometer, but I recommend buying a good one that gives you more control over the temperature. A good incubator will come with a thermostat that monitors the heat in the incubator and keeps it at a constant 99 degrees F.

You're also going to want to be able to measure and control the humidity. A good hygrometer will allow you to keep tabs on the humidity in your incubator. You're going to want the humidity to be at 50% for the first 18 to 19 days. Raise it 75% for the last couple days. Keeping the humidity at the proper level is important because it ensures the chick is able to break its way out of the egg shell at the end of incubation without drowning or getting stuck to the shell. Follow the instructions that came with your incubator to raise or lower humidity levels.

Eggs have to be turned at least 3 times a day. Flip them completely over each time you turn them or you run the risk of your eggs not developing. If they do, you'll get sick chicks that come out deformed. In order to make sure all of the eggs get turned at the same time, try putting different color dots on each side of the egg. You can make sure they all have the same color facing up each time you turn them.

Once your chicks hatch, leave them in the incubator for a day or two until they dry off. They don't need food for the first couple days. Chicks will fluff out and grow stronger if left in the incubator for at least 2 days.

Once you remove the chicks from the incubator, it's time to start feeding and watering them. Chicks need a constant source of food and water, so they can eat and drink whenever they want to. Your best bet is to keep the food and water

supplies in the box where you're keeping your chicks full. A starter mash is the best food to feed your chicks. You can get it at your local feed supply store or it can be ordered online.

Young chicks will drown themselves if given the chance. They'll throw themselves into any water source, so keep your water in a container the chicks won't be able to drown in. A small tray with pebbles in it will prevent your chicks from drowning.

Raising Chicks

You're going to want to keep your chicks indoors in a controlled environment for the first 5 to 8 weeks. You're going to want to keep your chicks in a brooder until they develop their feathers.

There are a number of containers you can use as brooders. I've seen aquariums, cat and dog carriers, cages and even cardboard boxes used as brooders. Any container onto which you can attach a lamp to keep your chicks warm can be used as a brooder.

Add 2" to 3" layer of bedding to the brooder. You're going to need to switch out the bedding every couple of days, so don't use anything expensive. The brooder needs to be clean or chicks become susceptible to all sorts of diseases.

You're going to need to keep the temperature at a constant 95 degree F for the first week you keep your chicks in the brooder. Lower the temperature by 5 degrees each successive week until your chicks grow their feathers in. Your chicks will tell you if they're too hot or too cold. If they're standing around with their mouths open, they're too hot. Chicks that are huddled up and shivering are too cold. You should place your heat source at one end of the box, so the chicks can move into and out of the heat as they see fit.

Chicks need constant food and water. Use waterers and feeders that are hard to get into and tip over. Chicks will climb in and knock over everything they can. They'll also poop in their food and water, so you're going to need to change it out frequently.

Keep a close eye on your chicks and watch for signs of distress and illness. Chicks can get pecky, and you may notice some of your chicks have injuries from being pecked by their mates. This is normal. Separate out any wounded chicks and give them time to heal in a separate brooder. Get rid of any chicks that are ill or unhealthy. Watch for a condition called "sticky bottom." Poop will dry and stick to the butts of your chicks. Clean the vent area with water or a bit of mineral oil. Don't just rip off the build-up. You could eviscerate your chicks.

When your chicks reach 4 to 5 weeks of age, it's time to start shutting down the lights for a few hours a day. Cut the lights off and leave your chicks alone in the brooder. Once you've been doing this for a week, you can start taking them outside for short periods of time. It's up to you to keep them safe. They won't be able to defend themselves or get away from predators. I like to bring them outside and set them free in a small fenced-off area I keep just for my chicks.

At 5 to 6 weeks, you can move your chicks out to the coop. If it's relatively warm at night, you can move them out there without a heat lamp. If the

temperatures drop below 40 degrees F at night, it's a good idea to provide a heat lamp for them to sleep under. You need to keep the chicks locked inside the coop for a couple days. This will home them in on the coop and will get them used to their home. After that, you can let them out during the day and lock them up at night.

Before long, you'll have happy and healthy chickens that you've raised yourself. It's rewarding and fun to raise chickens from eggs to chicks to full-grown chickens. You'll feel good watching your chickens grow into adulthood. Even if you don't want to do it all the time, it's something every backyard chicken owner should experience once.

Acclimate Young Chickens to the Flock

The previous section assumed you were moving your young chickens into an empty coop. Moving them into a coop occupied by adult chickens creates a whole new set of problems, not the least of which is having your chicks murdered by their coop mates.

Mature hens can be a grouchy bunch. They don't care for newcomers and have been known to peck them and attack them mercilessly. Luckily, there are some things you can do to help your new chickens get acclimated to the flock.

When moving chicks to an empty coop, it's OK to move them around 6 to 7 weeks of age. They don't have to protect themselves from other chickens and will be ready to live in the coop. If the coop you're moving your young chickens into is already occupied, you're going to need to wait until your young chickens have grown to close to the size of the hens you're putting them in the coop with. This can take as long as 10 weeks.

You're going to want to get the old chickens used to seeing the new chickens before you let them intermingle. You can do this by fencing off part of the coop and putting the new chickens in it for a couple days. After they've spent a couple nights together, it's time to let them intermingle. If your chickens are allowed to free-range, it's a good idea to do so at this time. This will give the new and old birds enough space to steer clear of each other while getting used to being in the same area.

Stay close by and intervene if there are any bloody battles.

The first couple nights you let your chickens sleep together can be a bit rough, especially when it comes to picking roost space. It's important you have at least 8" of roost space for each bird, because your mature hens aren't going to like sharing a roost with new birds. There are going to be battles. Break up any major scuffles until the chickens are settled in for the night.

Don't be surprised if your chickens still go at it for the first few days. There are new birds in the flock and a new pecking order needs to be established. All but the most docile of breeds are going to battle it out from time to time to establish the pecking order.

The Pecking Order

Flocks of birds have a hierarchy of command called the pecking order. All flocks of chickens I've ever seen have a pecking order in which one or two birds are dominant birds that exert their will over the rest of the chickens in the flock.

It's interesting to watch, as there's almost always a leader that runs the show. This leader establishes his or her dominance early on and doesn't hesitate to peck other birds and chase them away when they get too close.

The next bird down in the pecking order doesn't mess with the leader, but is dominant over the rest of the birds. The third bird in the pecking order steers clear of the first two, but dominates the rest of the flock. This phenomenon continues down to the last bird. The bird at the bottom of the pecking order gets bullied by all of the other birds in the flock.

When you add new birds to a flock, you'd expect the top birds to instantly establish their dominance. They do, but you might be surprised to find the birds at the bottom of the pecking order are even feistier. They're tired of being picked on and want to move up in the pecking order, so they're more prone to attacking new members of the flock.

Once the pecking order has been established, there isn't much you can do to change it.

You might feel bad for the bird or birds at the bottom of the pecking order because they're the last to eat and get the worst spots on the roost. It helps to understand that this is the nature of birds and there's always going to be a bird at the bottom.

If things get too bad, you can separate the bottom bird from the flock, but all that's really going to do is put another bird at the bottom. I like to separate my bottom bird out from the group every once in a while and give her special treats the rest of the birds don't get. Just don't let them see you giving her these treats . . . That'll get her picked on even more.

Feeding Your Chickens

What you feed your birds depends on how old they are and what you plan on doing with them. You can supplement your chicken's diet by letting roam free in your yard, where they'll eat insects and plant matter. If you have a big enough yard, you might be able to cut down on food costs drastically.

Make sure your chickens have grit. Grit acts like tiny teeth inside your chicken's stomach. It helps them grind up and digest food.

Let's take a look at what you should be feeding your chickens.

Chicks

New chicks should be fed mash for the first week or two. After that, you can switch over to a starter feed. This feed can be medicated or non-medicated. Medicated feed may help prevent your chicks from getting ill. Use non-medicated feed if you want to raise your chickens organically.

Starter feed contains high levels of protein and is designed to help your chicks grow quickly and develop into healthy chickens.

Meat Birds

Birds that are to be eaten need to be fed a meat bird feed that's been designed to help them grow up quickly. Meat birds mature in 6 to 8 weeks and need to be fed a feed that promotes rapid development.

Pullets

Young chickens that aren't chicks anymore, but haven't matured into full-grown chickens are known as pullets. Pullets need to be fed grower feed, which contains less protein than the rapid-growth feed given to chicks.

Laying Hens

Hens that are 5 months of age are ready to start laying eggs. Maturing and mature layer hens need to be fed layer feed, which contains added calcium and protein to ensure the hens are able to develop and lay healthy eggs.

Foods to Avoid

Wondering what you shouldn't feed your chickens?

The following foods should be avoided:

Alcohol. No drinking with your birds, no matter how many times they ask.

Apple seed.

Apricots.

Artichokes.

Avocados.

Balsam apple.

Balsam pear.

Buckwheat.

Cactus.

Cherries.

Chives.

Chocolate.

Clovers.

Dried beans.

Eggplant.

Fast food.

Flax.

Flower seeds. Some are OK, but if you aren't sure, it's best to avoid all seeds.

Garlic.

Holly.

Ivy.

Jasmine.

Junk food.

Kale.

Leeks.

Lima beans.

Mistletoe.

Moldy foods.

Mushrooms.

Mustard.

Oleander.

Onions.
Oranges.
Parsnip.
Peaches.
Peanuts.
Peppers.
Plums.
Potatoes.
Potato sprouts.
Raw meat.
Rhubarb.
Rotten or spoiled foods.
Sage.
Soybeans.
Sugar beet.
Sunflower.
Tomatoes.

10 Tips to Keep Your Chickens Happy and Healthy

People often ask me what it takes to keep my chickens happy and healthy. The answer to this question is "Not a whole lot." Chickens are easy to care for and will live a long time and produce a large number of eggs for you if you provide them with their basic needs.

The following 10 tips will help you keep your chickens happy and healthy:

1. **Build a bigger pen than you need.**

The more space your birds have, the happier they'll be. 3 square feet of coop space and 7 square feet of run space are the bare minimum you're going to need. Providing your birds more space than that will make them happy.

2. **Keep a constant supply of good food and clean water around.**

Keep your food and water containers full. Your chickens will be happy if they're able to eat and drink as they please. They'll also be happy if you toss them a special treat every once in a while like mealworms, table scraps or cooked meat. And yes, chickens will eat chicken meat.

3. **Keep it calm.**

Chickens can be noisy and rambunctious at times, but most of the time they prefer a peaceful environment. This means keeping your kids from constantly pestering them and keeping barking dogs and other sources of noise away.

4. **Let them free-range as much as possible.**

Your chickens are natural foragers and they love to be able to roam around the yard seeking out insects and plant matter. If you aren't comfortable letting them roam free (and who is in the city?), put up fences and let them roam around the fenced-in area.

5. **Keep predators at bay.**

Seeing their friends and eggs get attacked by hungry predators can stress out the surviving chickens and slow down egg production. Keep your

chickens safe and they'll be much happier.

6. Provide ample roosting space.

There should be enough roosting space so each of your birds has somewhere to roost. If not, the lower hens on the pecking order will have to sleep on the ground, where they'll be unhappy and more susceptible to getting sick.

7. Interact with your birds.

Chickens are a social bunch, and they seem to enjoy hanging out with and interacting with humans. Chicks that were raised indoors by a person will often imprint on the person who raised them. They'll follow that person around and will act like they think the person is their mother. They may even come when the "mother" calls them.

8. Let your chickens scratch.

Chickens like to be able to root around and scratch at the surface of the ground to find food. Tossing a couple handfuls of cracked corn or some other treat into the coop gives them something to scratch for. It also gets them to turn over the bedding, which can help knock down bad smells and keep things fresh.

9. Make sure your coop is free of drafts.

Cold is something chickens can handle. Cold combined with drafts isn't. Do what you need to do to make sure your coop is free of cold drafts.

10. Provide an area for dust baths.

Chickens love a nice dusty area where they can roll around and take a dust bath. Not only does this keep them happy, it helps keep mites and parasites at bay.

Taking these 10 simple steps will go a long way toward making sure your chickens are healthy and happy. Your chickens will thank you for it by producing healthy and nutritious eggs for many years to come.

Eggs Collection and Storage

If you hear your hens cackling, that's a pretty good sign there are eggs being laid. Hens are generally quiet, unless they're being threatened or are in the process of laying an egg.

You need to collect the eggs from your coop every morning. If an egg gets broken, clean up the egg and any of bedding that has egg residue on it. You don't want your chickens getting a taste of egg and realizing it's yummy food. A chicken that learns eggs contain food may start breaking open eggs to get at the yummy insides—and when this happens, your only real option is to get rid of the chicken. This habit is almost impossible to break.

I check my coops in the morning and in the late afternoon, just to make sure a late straggler or two didn't lay an egg during the day.

A freshly-laid egg has a coating on it called the "bloom" that dries up and protects the egg from bacteria. You don't need to wash this coating off. In fact, it's good to leave it on there to keep bacteria out.

If your eggs have chicken manure on them and you need to get it off, you can wash it with a damp cloth. If you have to scrub a dirty egg, brush it with a soft brush under warm water. Let your eggs dry before storing them in the fridge.

Fresh eggs will last for up to a month if refrigerated, but the sooner you eat them, the better they'll taste. Since you'll be collecting eggs every day, it helps to write the date on each egg you collect with a pencil. That way there's no question as to which eggs need to be used first.

Eat the freshest eggs. Hard boil or devil the eggs that are nearing a month old. Give away any extras to the neighbors or sell them to help recoup your costs. It never hurts to kick the neighbors down some eggs, especially if you have noisy roosters. They're much more likely to be understanding of your coop if they're reaping the benefits of it along with you.

How to Make Sure Your Chickens Lay Eggs Year-Round

Hens are on a natural cycle and will only lay eggs for 8 to 10 months of the year if you don't take action to keep them laying year-round. Their internal clocks stop egg production as the days grow shorter in the winter, only to start back up again as the days get longer in the spring.

The whole process is tied into how much light the hens get during the day.

The good news is you can extend the amount of light your hens get by adding a light or two on a timer in the henhouse. You need to make sure the lights stay on after it gets dark. A chicken needs at least 14 hours of light per day to keep laying eggs. You can bump this up to 15 to 16 hours day to good result.

Another trick you can use is to add a bit of cayenne pepper to your chicken feed. This will raise the internal temperature of your chickens and will boost egg production. Add a teaspoon of cayenne pepper for every pound of feed you have and make sure you mix it into the feed.

At times, you'll find your chicken's natural instinct to stop laying is too strong. They'll stop laying eggs for a couple months no matter what you do. This is natural and all you can do is wait it out.

Tips to Help Keep Your Chickens Healthy

Chickens are easy birds to raise, but like any animal, they can fall victim to a number of illness and ailments.

The following tips can be followed to help up the odds of your chickens staying happy and healthy well into the future:

Keep your coop clean. Remove soiled litter and replace it with clean litter regularly. If you're using the deep litter method, turn your litter over regularly and add fresh litter on top. Deep clean your coop at least twice a year by disinfecting it.

Don't forget to clean and disinfect the equipment you use. Shovels, rakes, feeders, waterers, *etc.* All need to be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Keep a pair of boots that you only wear into your coop. The number one way that disease gets into a coop is by it being brought there on your shoes or person. Keep a pair of boots near the coop and only wear them into your coop.

Stay out of other coops. Going into another coop and then entering your coop can bring airborne pathogens into your coop. If you've been on another farm or near another coop, take a shower and wash up before going in your coop. Never wear the same clothes into your coop that you've worn into another coop.

Keep other people out of your coop. You don't know where other people have been. You don't know what they have on their clothes and feet. Keeping them out of your coop allows you to keep your coop free of outside contamination.

Provide a dust bath area for your birds. Dust bathing keeps your birds happy. It also keeps them free of mites and parasites that can cause disease.

Keep wild birds away. Allowing wild birds to mingle with your birds can

transfer all sorts of avian illnesses to your chickens. Cover the tops of your runs to keep wild birds out.

Isolate your birds after showing them. If you've taken your birds to a fair or a show, you never know what they might have been exposed to. Keep your chickens that have been to a show in a separate area for a couple weeks and watch for signs of illness.

Keep rats and mice away. These pesky critters can carry disease into your coop.

Get rid of sick or dying birds. You might be tempted to keep a sick chicken around to see if it gets better. The problem is, the longer it's in the coop, the more likely it is to infect the rest of your birds. Move sick chickens to another area away from the flock and have them inspected by a vet who will be able to tell you the best course of action to take with the sick bird.

Learn to recognize the signs of illness. Keep an eye out for any of the following signs of illness:

- Coughing.
- Gasping.
- Wheezing.
- Falling.
- Stumbling.
- Death.
- Nasal discharge.
- Mucous.
- Diarrhea.
- Not eating or drinking.
- Slow movement.
- Less eggs.
- Deformed eggs.
- Eggs with thin shells.
- Swelling.
- Tumors.
- Purple wattles or combs.
- Shaking.

Watch your flock and look for anything out of the ordinary. Early detection of a problem may be the difference between only losing a few birds and having to cull your entire flock. While it's tough to have to get rid of a favorite chicken or two, it's even tougher to have to start completely over. Don't try to wait things out. Get sick chickens out of the coop as soon as possible.

Harvesting Chicken Manure

Chicken manure is one of the healthiest types of manure you can add to your lawn and garden.

It's a good thing you can use the manure for something, because chickens poop a lot. The average chicken poops as often as 25 to 30 times *per day*. This adds up to a lot of manure you're going to have to dispose of. You have to get it out of your coop regularly or the smell of the ammonia in the poop will build up and start to cause respiratory problems in your chickens.

The good news is it can be collected and added to your compost bin. You do have a compost bin, don't you?

If not, now would be a good time to start one. It's a bin into which you throw yard waste and all sorts of organic material, including chicken manure. Stir it up every once in a while to get oxygen into the mix and you'll create some of the best organic material to treat your lawn and garden with.

As long as you're using organic material like straw or wood shavings for bedding, you can collect the manure and the bedding and throw it all into your compost bin. If you're using sand, you're going to want to collect as little of the sand as possible. You can scoop the litter out using a kitty litter scoop. The sand that's stuck to the manure isn't going to be a problem. You just don't want to scoop all of the sand out of your coop and throw it in your compost bin.

Even if you can't use all of the compost you create yourself, your friends, family and neighbors will probably be more than willing to take it off your hands. Worst case scenario, you have to post an ad on Craigslist offering your extra compost up for sale. Yes, people actually will buy your chicken's poop for their garden.

Fresh chicken manure can contain harmful microorganisms that can harm your health and the health of your crops. Always compost manure before adding it to your lawn or garden.

Book 2

The Backyard Chickens Breed Guide: The Best (and Worst) Backyard Chicken Breeds by M. Anderson

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to my loving wife, who's had to deal with my obsession with backyard chickens, survival skills and homesteading for many long years. I love you sweetie! Thanks for being so understanding.

Let's Talk Backyard Chickens

So you've decided you want to raise backyard chickens. As you know, making up your mind to raise chickens is only half the battle. Once you've made the decision to raise chickens, the real fun begins.

There's a ton of information out there on building coops, on feeding and caring for chickens and on how to care for chicks. What's lacking is a one-stop place you can go to read about the various breeds of chicken you can raise in your backyard.

Well, your search is over.

This handy guide contains the information you need to know to make an informed decision about what breed (or breeds) of chickens you want to add to your flock. Using the information in this book, you'll be able to find the right type of chicken to suit your individual needs.

There are over 150 different breeds of chicken. This book doesn't cover every single breed. Instead, it focuses on the breeds that are best suited to be raised in backyard chicken flocks for food, eggs and as pets.

That's right, I said pets. If you've ever owned a chicken or a flock of chickens, you've undoubtedly been entertained by their antics. If not, boy are you in for a surprise. They're fun pets the whole family will love—and when was the last time your cat laid an egg?

Let's clarify a few terms used in the book right up front. Some of these terms mean different things to people in different parts of the world, so let's lay out what they mean in this book so there's no confusion.

A *rooster* is a full-grown male chicken. Roosters are presumed to be at least a year of age. Roosters under a year old are called *cockerels*. *Hens* are female chickens that have reached laying age, usually somewhere around the 4 to 6 month mark. *Pullets* are younger females that haven't started laying eggs yet. *Chicks* are baby chickens that are less than a month or two old.

There are four basic types of chicken. Meat chickens are grown to be harvested for food. Egg layers are raised to do just that, lay eggs. Dual-purpose chickens are raised both as egg layers and as a source of food. The fourth type of chicken is the show bird, which is raised as a pet that may or may not be entered into competitions.

Noisy Chickens

Noisy chickens are the bane of many backyard chicken owners existence. They wake you up early in the morning hooting and hollering every time they lay an egg, and they tick your neighbors off with their constant chatter.

For some of us, the "egg song" sung by hens is a beautiful song that's as much a part of nature as flowers and plants. We hear our chickens carrying on in the morning while they lay their eggs and it's music to our ears. For others, it's nothing more than loud screeching and irritating noise—especially when a coop full of loud chickens is in close proximity to a neighbor's house who has nothing to gain from you owning noisy birds.

If you live in the city and plan on owing roosters, you're either going to have to have understanding neighbors that will deal with your rooster's crowing or are willing to ignore it if you kick them down a few eggs, or you're going to have to completely disregard your neighbor's feelings about your bird. Quiet roosters are a rarity. Even the most quiet of roosters usually lets out a wake-up call in the morning and another in the evening. Most roosters carry on throughout the day as well.

Some breeds of chicken are noisier than others and aren't well-suited to urban life. I've made every effort to identify these birds, so you aren't surprised once your chicks grow up and start raising a racket. Be aware that the information I'm providing is not guaranteed to be true for your individual birds. There are cases where people have bought birds that are thought to be a quiet breed only to find they've got a particularly noisy group of birds.

It can work the other way around, too. You may find a group of birds that's said to be noisy that don't make much noise. If you're raising a dual-purpose flock of chickens, you can keep the quieter birds around as egg-layers and eat the louder birds.

To be completely honest, there's no such thing as a silent flock of chickens. All chickens make noise. It's a matter of finding a noise level you can live with and that won't start a war with your neighbors. That is, unless you're looking to start a war. Then go with the noisiest birds you can find and go heavy on the roosters. You'll have your neighbors raising the white flag in no time.

When your flock starts raising a racket, there are some things you can try to get them to quiet down. Here are a handful of tactics you can try when you want your birds to quiet down:

Check for predators. Chickens get loud when they feel threatened. Do a perimeter check to make sure there aren't any predators trying to sneak up on your flock.

Don't change stuff around in your yard. Some chickens don't like change and will complain loudly when you move things around or add something new. They'll usually get used to change or the new items and will quiet down after a day or two.

Give them something to keep them occupied. Throw a handful of scratch or feed in the dirt or grass for them to dig around and root up. Keeping your birds busy may help keep them quiet.

Play soothing music. I don't know why this one works, but it does. Play your birds some classical music and watch as they calm down and relax.

Ancona



Figure 1: Ancona chicken. By Festina lente (Own work) CC-BY-SA-3.0-2.5-2.0-1.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>), via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: Italy.

Type: Egg-layer.

Size: 4 to 6 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh 1 to 2 pounds.

Price per Chick: \$1 to \$2 for standard birds. \$3 to \$4 for Bantams.

Health: Hardy.

Temperament: Alert. Must be handled from a young age to be receptive to humans. Don't do well when confined.

Egg production: High. 250+ medium eggs. Not prone to going broody.

Egg Color: White.

Noise Level: Loud, especially when laying.

Special Considerations: Anconas do best when raised as free-range birds.

Synopsis

Anconas are pretty little chickens that are a good addition to most free-range flocks. Their feathers are smooth and silky, and they have iridescent tips that end in green and white. This gives them a speckled look that appears to shimmer in sunlight. They make good pets as long as they've been handled from the time they are chicks. If not, they tend to be shy and will avoid human contact.

There are two different comb types available. Single-combed Anconas have a large comb that extends past the back of their head. Rose-combed Anconas have shorter combs that don't extend as far to the back.

This breed loves to free-range and is a great forager. They can be kept in a coop and run, but they're much happier when they can roam around the yard looking for tasty treats.

Anconas can get a bit noisy, especially when they're laying their eggs, so you're either going to need to keep the coop away from the neighbor's house or you're going to have to have understanding neighbors. They lay enough eggs to keep you and your neighbors supplied year-round, so maybe passing a few eggs on will help keep the peace.

If you're looking for a small bird that's great at laying eggs, Anconas are a good fit. The hens weigh in at around 4 pounds and are capable of laying more than 250 eggs a year. They rarely go broody, so they aren't a good choice if you want to raise your own chicks. Anconas are good winter layers that will continue to produce white eggs well into the winter months.

Ameraucana



Figure 2: Ameraucana rooster. By Royale Photography (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Egg-layer.

Size: 5 to 6 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh 1 to 2 pounds.

Price per Chick: \$5 to \$20 for standard birds. \$5 to \$20 for Bantams.

Health: Hardy. Able to withstand cold.

Temperament: Non-aggressive.

Egg production: High. 250+ eggs per year.

Egg Color: Blue.

Noise Level: Roosters tend to be excessively vocal. Hens are relatively quiet.

Special Considerations: Ameraucanas lay blue eggs. They taste the same as regular white and brown eggs, but the shells are blue.

Synopsis

There's a wide variance in price amongst Ameraucana chicks. The reason for this variance is some hatcheries sell chicks as Ameraucanas that don't actually meet the American Poultry Association's breed requirements. What this means is you're getting a chicken that's similar to a true Ameraucana and will lay blue eggs, but it isn't show quality. As long as you aren't planning on showing your bird, you get pretty much the same thing for a cheaper price.

Ameraucanas are prolific layers capable of laying more than 250 eggs a year. Did I mention the eggs they lay are blue? This is one of only a handful of breeds of chicken capable of laying blue eggs. If you want to impress your friends, adding an Ameraucana or two to your flock is a good idea.

If you're planning on getting an Ameraucana rooster, you're going to have to be willing to deal with the noise. They are excessively loud and crow at all hours of the day. Your neighbors probably won't like your rooster, unless they have chickens of their own (or are very understanding). Ameraucana hens, on the other hand, aren't very vocal. They'll make a bit of noise when laying an egg, but won't raise a racket all day long like the roosters tend to do.

Andalusian



Figure 3: Blue Andalusian By Костюшко (Own work)
[CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>) or GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>)], via **Wikimedia Commons**

Just the Facts

Origin: Mediterranean.

Type: Egg-layer. Also used as show birds.

Size: 5 to 7 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh 1.5 to 2 pounds.

Price per Chick: \$2 to \$4 for standard birds. \$5 to \$7 for Bantams.

Health: Unknown.

Temperament: Active.

Egg production: Medium. 150+ eggs per year.

Egg Color: White.

Noise Level: Noisy.

Special Considerations: Roosters have large combs. Add a bit of Vaseline to the comb or bring your roosters indoors during cold weather.

Synopsis

While Andalusians come in white, black or blue, the only color accepted for showing by the American Poultry Association is blue. Blue birds are rare because they're a cross between White and Black Andalusians. Mating a White

Andalusian rooster with a Black Andalusian hen produces Blue Andalusians. Oddly enough, when you mate two Blue Andalusians, you only get about 50% blues. The rest of the chicks will be black and white.

These birds are decent layers of white eggs. They'll produce somewhere in the range of 150 eggs a year in optimal conditions. They do well in coops and tractors. While they're relatively rare, they're a decent choice for backyard flocks and there are a growing number of breeders carrying Andalusian chickens. Andalusians aren't known for going broody.

Bantam Andalusians are extremely rare and command a premium price. The Bantam birds weigh in at between 1.5 to 2 pounds.

Andalusians are noisy chickens, especially when they're distressed. These aren't great birds to own if you're going to have a coop in close proximity to your neighbors.

Appenzeller



Figure 4: Appenzeller Spitzhauben. By Alice Wilkman from Chapel Hill NC, USA (Flickr) [CC-BY-SA-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: Switzerland.

Type: Show bird. Can also be used as egg-layer.

Size: 3 to 5 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes, but very rare.

Price per Chick: \$3 to \$5.

Health: Unknown.

Temperament: Active. Don't do well when confined in a coop and run.

Egg production: Fair. 100 to 150 eggs a year.

Egg Color: White.

Noise Level: Noisy. Both the hens and roosters are loud.

Special Considerations: Appenzellers do best when raised as free-range birds.

Synopsis

There are two types of Appenzeller chickens, both of which are rather rare. The Appenzeller Spitzhauben (pictured above) has a funny plume of feathers coming off the top of its head and is the most commonly found Appenzeller in

North America. The Appenzeller Barhuhner doesn't have the plume and is hard to find.

Colors include silver, black or spangled plumage. The silver spangled birds are especially striking, as they have black, silver and white plumage that instantly draws in attention.

Appenzellers are primarily raised as show birds, but they're decent layers. They lay 100 to 150 medium white eggs a year. They do best as free-range birds and will roost in trees if any are present. They're very active and don't appreciate being kept in a run or a tractor.

You're going to want some space between your coop and neighbor's houses if you plan on adding Appenzellers to your flock. The hens have a screechy cluck and they aren't afraid to use it, especially when they have an egg in the works. You'll know when your Appenzeller hens are laying an egg—and so will your neighbors. Appenzellers aren't the best choice for backyard coops where space is limited, but are good chickens to raise if you're able to keep your coop far enough away from your neighbors that screeching won't bother them.

Araucana



Figure 5: Araucana hen.

Just the Facts

Origin: South America.

Type: Egg-layer.

Size: 5 to 7 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantam weighs between 1 and 2 pounds.

Price per Chick: Pure Araucanas can run as high as \$50 per chick.

Health: Hardy. Able to handle hot and cold weather.

Temperament: Calm and aware.

Egg production: Fair. 150+ eggs a year.

Egg Color: Blue.

Noise Level: Varies. Roosters are loud in the morning and evening. Hens may carry on all day.

Special Considerations: It's hard to find pure Araucanas.

Synopsis

True Araucanas have a couple interesting traits.

First, they lay blue eggs. That alone is enough to make them a popular chicken breed. The blue eggs only differ in color from regular eggs. They look and taste the same once they've been cracked open. There's no difference in nutritional value between the blue eggs and normal brown or white eggs.

The second trait is some of the birds have tufts that protrude from the sides of their face. These tufts give them a unique look that reminds me of a large bushy mustache. You can clearly see the tufts in the image above. The problem with these tufts is the genes that cause Araucanas to grow them also cause chick mortality. When two tufted birds mate, a quarter of the birds will die before they hatch. Another quarter won't have tufts, while half of them will come out tufted.

The high mortality rate of these birds led some breeders to cross them with other birds to breed the tufting out. The cross-breeds may be sold under the name Auracana, but are actually what purists call Easter Eggers. You'll still get blue eggs from Easter Eggers, but they aren't pure-bred Auracanas.

As an interesting aside, you may want to seek out Easter Eggers because they don't just lay blue eggs. Some Easter Eggers are capable of laying pink and green eggs in addition to the blue ones.

Like all roosters, Araucana roosters will crow in the morning and evening, but they tend to quiet down during the day. That is, unless you get the rare Araucana rooster that just won't shut up. Araucana hens, on the other hand, can carry on all day. They're especially loud in the morning when they're laying their eggs. Not a good bird to have around if you have sensitive neighbors.

Australorp



Figure 6: Australorp rooster. By Anjwalker (Own work) [CC-BY-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: Australia.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: 7 to 10 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes, but very rare.

Price per Chick: \$1 to \$4 for standard. \$4 to \$5 for Bantam.

Health: Hardy.

Temperament: Gentle giants.

Egg production: Good. 250+ eggs a year.

Egg Color: Cream.

Noise Level: Low. Good choice for backyard chickens.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

The Australorp is Australia's version of the Orpington chicken. Orpingtons were combined with a number of other breeds, including Rhode Island Reds, White Leghorns and Minorcas, to create a hardy, dual-purpose breed. Black

Australorps are the most popular variety because of the greenish-purple sheen that radiates from their black feathers when the light hits them just right.

These docile chickens are known for getting along well with each other and other birds. While they don't attack other birds unless provoked, they will defend themselves and often rise close to the top of the pecking order. They aren't particularly aggressive or noisy, which makes them a good choice for backyard breeders. When Australorps do cluck, it's usually a soft cluck that's calm and peaceful, instead of the noisy clucks some other breeds are known for.

Australorps are great layers of light-brown to cream colored eggs. A single hen can lay as many as 300 large eggs a year, but 200 to 250 is a more reasonable expectation. They do go broody and will sit on nests, so you can use them to raise chicks if you so desire.

Children love Australorps because they aren't aggressive and will allow you to pick them up and hold them. Australorps make great pets for families with small children, because they're able to withstand a bit of rough treatment.

Bantam Australorps that range between 1.5 and 3 pounds are occasionally available, but can be hard to find. If you want Bantams and find them for sale, you'd better get them while you can. People tend to snatch up the Bantams as soon as they come to market.

Australorps are good backyard chickens because they don't usually make a lot of noise. I've heard reports of the occasionally noisy hen, but for the most part, the only time they make noise is when they're laying eggs. The roosters are as loud as any rooster, but aren't excessively noisy.

Brahma



Figure 7: By Inugami-bargho (Own work)
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via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: Asiatic.

Type: Show. Occasionally bred for meat and eggs.

Size: 9 to 13 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh 2 to 3 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$2 to \$4 for standard. \$3 to \$5 for Bantam.

Health: Good.

Temperament: Docile. Great pets. Roosters will defend flock against perceived threats.

Egg production: Good. 200+ eggs a year.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Quiet. Good choice for backyard chickens.

Special Considerations: Brahmas prefer cool, dry climates.

Synopsis

Brahma chickens were originally bred for meat purposes. They're slow-growing birds that can reach 13 or more pounds when they mature. The meat is

good table fare, but they're rarely eaten, probably because they're slow growers and can take as long as 2 years to reach full size. If you do decide to eat a Brahma, they're best if butchered before they reach a year of age.

In modern times, they've become a show bird. They're big and fluffy, and their legs are covered in fluffy feathers that make them appear even bigger than they are. Brahmas are a favorite amongst backyard breeders because they make great pets and are good with children. They're calm birds that seem to enjoy being around people.

Brahmas prefer cool weather and dry conditions. Wet soil sticks to their leg feathers and makes them miserable.

The hens make a cute soft cooing sound as they go about their daily business. They carry themselves well and are as quiet as chickens get. Brahmas are generally considered to be a good choice for a backyard chicken flock because of their noise level.

Broilers (Cornish Rock or Cornish Cross)



Figure 8: Broiler Chicken by [User:Cros2519]
CC-BY-SA-3.0-2.5-2.0-1.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>), via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: Cross-breed.

Type: Meat.

Size: Harvested at 4 to 5 pounds. Can grow to 10 to 11 pounds if allowed to grow.

Bantam Availability: No. If you want smaller broilers, process your birds at an earlier age.

Price per Chick: \$1 to \$2.

Health: Poor, if allowed to grow past 2 month mark. Prone to heart, leg and back problems.

Temperament: Varies from active to inactive.

Egg production: Low.

Egg Color: Light brown.

Noise Level: Low.

Special Considerations: Broilers should be harvested before they reach maturity.

Synopsis

Broiler chickens, also known as Cornish Rock Chickens or Cornish Cross Chickens, are the Toyota Corolla of the chicken world. They aren't anything fancy and won't get many oohs and aahs, but they're good at what they've been designed for.

Broiler chickens are raised for one purpose only, and that's to put meat on the table.

These chickens grow fast. If kept in a coop and fed a high-protein feed, they grow to 4 to 5 pounds in a month and a half, at which time they need to be slaughtered and prepared. Organic free-range birds grow a little slower, but will be ready for the dinner table within 8 to 12 weeks. Jumbo size birds are available that grow to even bigger sizes.

Let a broiler grow past 2 to 3 months of age and you're looking for trouble.

They've been bred to put on muscle mass fast in order to be good table fare. They haven't been bred to live long, healthy lives. Broilers that are allowed to grow into mature chickens are plagued with all sorts of health issues, the most common of which is heart trouble.

If you want an inexpensive source of chicken meat that grows quickly and doesn't require a bunch of feed, broiler chickens are a good bet. If you want to raise chickens to maturity to keep as pets or to produce eggs, you're better off looking for another breed.

Broilers generally aren't loud birds, but then again, they're rarely allowed to grow to maturity because of the health problems they're prone to as they get older. Even if your broilers get a little noisy, you'll be harvesting them for the table shortly after you place them in the coop.

Buckeye

Sorry, but the author wasn't able to obtain an image of a buckeye chicken in time to add it to this book. If you have a buckeye chicken and would like to donate an image for future editions of this book, please send an e-mail to:

mike_rashelle@yahoo.com

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: 6 to 9 lbs.

Bantam Availability: No.

Price per Chick: \$4 to \$5.

Health: Good. Cold-hardy.

Temperament: Generally calm, but can get a bit pecky with other birds.

Egg production: Medium. 150+ eggs a year.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Vocal. Can get loud.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

Buckeyes are an endangered breed of chicken. It's estimated there are only around 5,000 Buckeyes left in the world today. This is a bit surprising, as they're pretty brown-colored birds with shiny feathers that are fairly tame.

They're cold-hardy, which makes them a good choice for northern states. They'll continue to lay eggs well into the cold winter months. The hens will go broody and are good sitters. Under good conditions, you'll get 150 or more eggs per year.

Buckeye hens are vocal birds that will cluck and carry on at one another, but usually aren't loud unless something upsets them. The roosters, on the other hand, can let out an excessively loud "roar" that sounds like a dinosaur has invaded your yard. You might be able to get away with Buckeye hens in a small yard, but bring in a rooster and all your neighbors are going to know.

Cochin



Figure 9: Cochin hen. By grongar (Chicken) [CC-BY-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: China.

Type: Ornamental. Limited laying capability.

Size: 8 to 11 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh 1.5 to 2 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$4 to \$5.

Health: Good.

Temperament: Docile and friendly.

Egg production: Low.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Quiet. Good backyard chickens.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

Cochins are friendly birds that are fluffy and have leg feathers. They're often described as looking like a big ball of feathers. The soft, fluffy feathers make the already large Cochin appear even bigger than it actually is. There are a ton of colors available. At last count, there were more than 15 different colors of

Cochin being sold.

They are people-oriented birds that aren't scared of human contact. It isn't uncommon for Cochins to walk right up to a sitting person and hop up in their lap. They're one of the more patient chickens breeds and are one of the best to have when you have kids around.

These birds are mainly for show. They will lay an egg here and there, but egg production is way behind some of the faster laying breeds. You'll be lucky if you get 100 eggs a year from a Cochin. The hens do go broody and are good mothers capable of hatching and raising chicks of all types. I've seen Cochins hatch ducks, other chicks, geese and even falcon eggs.

Bantam Cochins are available. They weigh in at 1.5 to 2 lbs. and are similar in qualities to the bigger Cochins.

Cochins are quiet chickens that usually only make noise when they're laying an egg. They're a popular choice amongst backyard chicken enthusiasts looking for birds that aren't going to make a lot of noise.

Jersey Giant



Figure 10: Jersey Giant Rooster by AlishaV.
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en>)

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: Large. 10 to 13 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes, but rare. Weighs 3 to 4 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$1 to \$3 for standard. \$3 to \$5 for Bantam.

Health: Good.

Temperament: Varies. Usually not very active.

Egg production: High. Capable of 200+ eggs per year.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Medium. They aren't loud, but they aren't exactly quiet either.

Special Considerations: Jersey Giants are large chickens that require a lot of feed.

Synopsis

The Jersey Giant was developed by John and Thomas Black in the late 1800's. The original intent was to create a breed capable of replacing the turkey. That didn't happen, but a giant breed of chicken was created that's good to eat and lays extra-large eggs.

Jersey Giants are dual-purpose chickens used for both eggs and meat. They start off growing slow, but soon pass up other chickens. By the time they're 6 months old they can weigh as much as 13 pounds. How's that for table fare? They're also prolific egg-layers capable of laying 250+ large brown eggs a year when conditions are right.

Bantam Jersey Giants are available, but doesn't getting a smaller version of a bird labeled as "Giant" kind of defeat the purpose?

The noise level of Jersey Giants isn't too loud, but it isn't exactly quiet either. They're generally considered good backyard chickens (with the rare detractor here and there), but can be vocal birds when they're displeased about something. You aren't going to hide Jersey Giants from the neighbors, but you probably aren't going to drive them crazy with the noise.

Langshan



Figure 11: Outback hens at the English language Wikipedia CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>), from Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: Asian.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: 6 to 9 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Weighs 2 to 3 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$4 to \$5.

Health: Good, as long as shelter is provided.

Temperament: Varies. Usually not very active.

Egg production: Medium. Capable of up to 150 eggs per year.

Egg Color: Dark Brown.

Noise Level: Generally quiet. Make a soft warbling noise.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

Langshans are of Asiatic decent and most likely originated in China. The first known Langshans were brought from China into Britain in the late 1800's and into the United States shortly thereafter. There are three recognized colors of Langshan: black, blue and white. The Black Langshans are especially striking, as they appear to have a green sheen when the light hits them just right.

These hens are good layers, but not great. The eggs they lay are a striking dark brown color. Under optimal conditions, Langshans can lay 150 eggs a year and are capable of laying during the cold winter months. Langshans will go broody and are a good choice if you want a mother hen around to hatch eggs and raise chicks.

The meat of the Langshan is both tasty and tender. Free-range Langshans are some of the best tasting chicken meat around.

Bantam versions of the Langshan are available. They're good little birds that lay dark brown eggs. They weigh in at between 2 to 3 pounds.

Langshan hens are quiet birds that warble a bit as they go about their daily business. The warbling is soft and probably won't bother anyone. The roosters are typical roosters. They can get loud from time to time, especially in the mornings.

Leghorn



Figure 12: Leghorn hen.

Just the Facts

Origin: Italy.

Type: Egg-layers.

Size: 5 to 8 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weight 1.5 to 3 pounds.

Price per Chick: \$3 to \$5 for standard and Bantam sizes.

Health: Good. Not suited for cold weather.

Temperament: Nervous.

Egg production: Great. Can reach 300+ eggs per year.

Egg Color: White.

Noise Level: Medium to High.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

If you watched Sunday morning cartoons as a kid, you've probably got fond memories of a Leghorn chicken. Foghorn Leghorn is probably the best-known chicken in the world. Foghorn Leghorn was a white Leghorn rooster.

Leghorns are prolific layers of white eggs. You can get 300+ white eggs a year from a Leghorn under optimal condition. They are the number one bird used in the United States for white egg production.

While they're great layers, Leghorns typically aren't people-oriented and prefer to be left alone. They avoid humans and will actively seek to get away from a person who tries to approach them. I've heard stories of tame Leghorns that have been raised to enjoy human contact, but I've never had much luck myself. If you raise Leghorns, you're going to get a lot of eggs, but you may not get a bird that's approachable. As long as you understand that, you're good to go.

Leghorns are rarely used as meat birds.

If you raise Leghorns in cold weather, extra precaution must be taken. They have large combs that can get frostbite if the weather turns cold. Add a bit of petroleum jelly to their comb to keep them safe.

Leghorns aren't ideal when you have neighbors close by because they are noisy birds that can really raise a racket. The hens can be loud when laying eggs and the roosters are obnoxious. I've heard a number of reports of people owning quiet leghorns, so it may just be the luck of the draw, but my experience with leghorns is that they're a loud breed of chicken.

Marans



Figure 13: Cuckoo Marans. By Libralove (Own work)

Just the Facts

Origin: France.

Type: Primarily show birds, but also used as dual-purpose birds.

Size: 7 to 10 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes, but very rare.

Price per Chick: \$3 to \$20, depending on the color.

Health: Hardy and disease-resistant.

Temperament: Calm, but very active.

Egg production: Medium. 100 to 150 eggs per year.

Egg Color: Dark brown.

Noise Level: Generally quiet, but some individual birds can be noisy.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

Marans are a popular show bird. The following 9 colors are recognized:

Birchen.

Black Copper.

Black.

Black-tailed buff.

Columbian.

Cuckoo.

Golden Cuckoo.

Wheaton.

White.

The cost of chicks varies widely, based on how popular the color being sold is and how rare the chicks are at the moment. Some chicks can cost as much as \$20 per chick.

Marans are docile birds and are good pets. They like to free-range, but can do just fine in coops or tractors. The dark brown eggs they lay are unmatched in color by any other chicken. They're decent layers capable of laying 150 eggs a year. They're also said to be good eating, but people rarely eat them because of the cost per chick.

Be aware that the people who raise Marans for show can get rather grouchy with those who raise them as dual-purpose or laying hens.

While there's something to be said about those who seek to preserve bloodlines, that usually isn't the intent of backyard chicken breeders. It's OK to be passionate about a breed, but you shouldn't be so passionate you turn your nose up at those who aren't as dedicated to breed preservation as you are. There's more than enough room for chicken enthusiasts of all types.

Marans are usually quiet birds that go about their daily business without making too much of a racket. There are some very loud exceptions to this rule. The occasional Marans hen will carry on no matter what you do. They can get a bit noisy when they're laying eggs, but that's something all chickens do.

New Hampshire



Figure 14: New Hampshire hen. Image by Zul32.

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: 5 to 9 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh around 2 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$1 to \$3 for full-size birds. \$3 to \$4 for Bantams.

Health: Hardy.

Temperament: Varies from calm to very aggressive.

Egg production: High. Can produce nearly 300 eggs a year if conditions are optimal. Prone to going broody.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Medium.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

New Hampshire chickens are derived from the Rhode Island Red breed. Rhode Island Reds were selectively bred until a new breed was created. They're relatively new to the world of chickens, and were only just recognized as a breed in the mid-1930's. Mature New Hampshire chickens are a deep red color that

borders on brown.

They're large dual-purpose birds that are both good layers and good meat birds. New Hampshire chickens mature quickly and dress out nicely. Harvest your meat birds when they're young for best results. These birds are used more as meat birds than egg layers, but they're pretty good layers, too.

As layers, they can lay a lot of eggs. Some hens can lay 250+ eggs a year. They're prone to going broody, so you may lose some egg production when this happens.

New Hampshire chickens aren't overly loud, but they've been known to carry on all day at a low murmur. They're not shy with their egg song and will often trumpet the arrival of a new egg loudly. The roosters are typical roosters. They make noise, but it isn't anything out of the ordinary.

Orpingtons



Figure 15: Splash, Blue and Buff Orpington. By Outback hens.
at [en.wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0), CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>) from **Wikimedia Commons**

Just the Facts

Origin: English.

Type: Dual-purpose. Can also be used as show birds.

Size: Large. 8 to 10 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh between 2 and 3 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$1 to \$3 for full-size birds. \$2 to \$3 for Bantams.

Health: Hardy.

Temperament: Gentle.

Egg production: High. 200 large eggs a year. Prone to going broody.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Varies.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

Orpington chickens are the gold standard of dual-purpose breeds for backyard chicken enthusiasts. Orpingtons are large, friendly birds that are easy to own and care for. Owners of Orpingtons often comment on how friendly these birds are and it isn't uncommon to hear them say they're the best birds they've ever owned.

You can get Orpingtons in a number of colors, with the buff color being the

most popular. Buff Orpingtons are a pretty copper color that really stands out and draws your attention. They're also available in black, blue, white, red and a number of other interesting colors.

Orpingtons are great layers; they're good on the dinner table and they can be used as show birds. You get the best of all worlds with Orpingtons. They lay 150 to 200 eggs a year and will lay year-round. Broody Orpingtons are great mothers that will sit on eggs and raise chicks. There's nothing more beautiful than an Orpington hen showing her chicks around the yard.

If you want the endearing qualities of an Orpington, but don't have room for full-size Orpingtons, Orpington Bantams may be an option. The smaller Orpingtons weigh in at between 2 and 3 pounds and are similar to their larger counterparts.

When it comes to noise, Orpingtons are all over the place. Many people own Orpingtons that are great birds that are quiet most of the time. Other people have had to get rid of their Orpingtons because they're so loud they drive the neighbors crazy. If you're willing to cull a few birds, you may be able to build up a decent group of quiet Orpingtons. If culling isn't your thing, you're probably better off picking another breed.

Plymouth Rock



Figure 16: By Thomas Kriese (Sophia and ZsuZsu walking the property) [CC-BY-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: 7 to 10 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh between 2 and 3 lbs.

Price per Chick: \$1.50 to \$3 for full-size birds. \$2 to \$3 for Bantams.

Health: Good. Cold-hardy.

Temperament: Calm. Chicks have sharp beaks and can do damage to other chicks.

Egg production: Depends on the type of bird. Usually between 150 and 250 a year. Hens will go broody and raise chicks.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: Varies. Some are noisy and some are quiet.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

This is one of the most popular chickens in the United States, partially

because they've been around since the days of the Pilgrims, but more because they're great dual-purpose birds that can survive in any climate the U.S. has to offer. These friendly birds are good table fare, and the hens are capable of laying hundreds of eggs a year. They can be kept in pens and coops, or they can be allowed to roam free.

While the Barred Plymouth Rock chickens are by far the most popular color, there are a number of other colors on the market today. You can find these birds in white, buff, blue, black, silver penciled, Columbian, partridge and barred colors. The barred birds are popular because they appear to have white and black stripes.

There's something to be said about the calm, even temperament of these birds. They live long lives and are steady layers that will lay eggs no matter the weather as long as they have enough light. Plymouth Rock chickens get along good with other birds and with people.

Bantams are available. The Plymouth Rock Bantams are cold-hardy, which is a rarity in Bantam breeds. They're a good choice for people who have small yards, but still want chickens that are good layers. These Bantams can be a bit tough to find, so you may have to do some searching to hunt them down.

When it comes to noise, Plymouth Rock chickens can fall on either side of the fence. I've owned birds that rarely made a peep, while others cooed and clucked all day long, especially in the morning when they were laying eggs. The roosters don't seem to be super loud, but will sound off whenever they feel the need.

Rosecomb Bantam



ROSE-COMB BLACK BANTAM MALE

Just the Facts

Origin: Britain.

Type: Show bird.

Size: 1 to 2 pounds.

Bantam Availability: This bird only comes in Bantam sizes.

Price per Chick: \$2.50 to \$3

Health: Decent. Winter hardy.

Temperament: Can be mean. Flighty.

Egg production: Low. Not prone to going broody.

Egg Color: Cream.

Noise Level: High.

Special Considerations: Rosecomb Bantams are purely for show.

Synopsis

Rosecomb Bantams are a proud little chicken that'll strut around the coop like it owns the place. Just don't let your Rosecomb Bantams out in the open. They love to fly and will fly up and perch on high objects. Rosecomb Bantams aren't hardy birds, so they may not be a great choice for the first-timer.

These ornamental birds are kept as show birds. If you want a cool looking little bird to show off to your friends, a Rosecomb Bantam or two may fit the bill. They're available in a number of colors, including blue, barred, splash, black and white.

Don't bother looking for full-size Rosecombs. They're only available in the Bantam size.

Rosecomb Bantams aren't known for being quiet birds. They aren't the best choice for urban backyard chicken enthusiasts with neighbors in close proximity.

Rhode Island Red



Figure 17: Rhode Island Red. By Erica Zahn (Own work)

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Dual-purpose.

Size: 7 to 10 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes.

Price per Chick: \$2 to \$3 for standard. \$4 to \$5 for Bantams.

Health: Hardy. Able to handle cold weather.

Temperament: Smart and friendly.

Egg production: High. 200 to 300 eggs a year.

Egg Color: Brown.

Noise Level: High.

Special Considerations: None.

Synopsis

A true American classic, Rhode Island Reds are one of the most popular chicken types in America. They're one of the best dual-purpose laying birds you can buy and are a favorite amongst those who keep backyard chickens. They lay large brown eggs and are capable of laying 200+ eggs a year. If given the right amount of light, these birds will often lay eggs year-round.

In addition to laying eggs, these birds mature quickly and the younger Reds are good fryers. Harvest them before they reach the 3 month mark for best results. Older Reds can be eaten, but they tend to be a little tough.

Rhode Island Reds are tough, cold-resistant birds, which makes them the perfect bird for Northern climates where it gets cold in the winter and stays that way for long periods of time. Keep cold drafts out of your coop and your chickens should make it through the winter no worse for wear.

Bantam Rhode Island Reds are available. They weigh between 1.5 and 2 pounds and are fun little birds. You'll get eggs from the Bantams, too, albeit smaller ones than you'll get from the full-size birds. Rhode Island Red Bantams make great pets and can be used as show birds if you so desire.

While Rhode Island Reds are a popular backyard breed because of their laying capabilities, they aren't a great choice when you have neighbors close by because of the noise. They get especially noisy in the mornings when they're laying an egg and during the day when they see something they don't like.

Silkies



Figure 18: By Wim Lewis from Seattle, USA (A fuzzy baby chicken (and its mom)) [CC-BY-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Just the Facts

Origin: Asiatic.

Type: Meat and Show.

Size: 3 to 4 pounds.

Bantam Availability: Yes.

Price per Chick: \$2 to \$4.

Health: Good.

Temperament: Docile. Good with kids. Silkies are great pets.

Egg production: 3 to 4 eggs a week.

Egg Color: Cream. A select few have been bred to lay blue eggs.

Noise Level: Low. Good backyard breed in urban areas.

Special Considerations: Silkies are prone to going broody and will want eggs to sit on from time to time.

Synopsis

Silkies are the only chicken breed that has down-like feathers covering its entire body. They are soft and fluffy and have a unique appearance that sets them apart from the rest of the chicken world. Silkies, as a breed, have been around for almost a thousand years. They originated in Asia and are sometimes called Chinese Silkies.

You can find Silkies in a variety of colors, including red, black, blue, grey and white. Some Silkies have beards of feathers that extend below their beaks. Because of their unique looks, Silkies are often kept for pets and as show birds. They're extremely laid back, as far as chickens go. They're docile birds that tend to be on the quiet side.

They haven't historically been a popular meat bird in the United States because their meat and skin is black or dark blue. They're gaining in popularity because it's recently come to people's attention that the black meat of the Silkie contains elevated levels of an antioxidant called carnosine. The black meat tastes similar to regular chicken, but can be off-putting because of its unique color.

Silkies are decent egg layers, but they tend to go broody and only lay around a hundred eggs a year.

This tendency to go broody can be used to your advantage. You can keep a silky or two around to sit on fertilized eggs you want to hatch. Chickens will sit on eggs from other birds, so you can use a broody Silkie to hatch eggs from pretty much any breed of chicken.

Keeping Silkies in a mixed flock with other more aggressive birds can open them up to bullying. They'll more than likely end up at the bottom of the pecking order. This is natural and there isn't much you can do to change it, no matter how much you love your Silkie.

Silkies are one of the best backyard breeds for those breeders who want to raise quiet chickens. There is the occasional Silkie that's noisy, but for the most part this is one of the quietest breeds of chicken you can get. If you want the best chance at getting a quiet chicken, you could do a whole lot worse than a Silkie.

Sumatra



Figure 19: Sumatra hen. By Wanny from nl
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Just the Facts

Origin: Sumatra.

Type: Show. Limited laying abilities.

Size: 3 to 5 lbs.

Bantam Availability: No.

Price per Chick: \$4 to \$6.

Health: Good.

Temperament: Wild. Need space to roam.

Egg production: Less than 100 eggs a year.

Egg Color: White.

Noise Level: Can be loud.

Special Considerations: Sumatras need space to roam around in and don't do well when confined in small areas.

Synopsis

The Sumatra chicken was originally brought into the U.S. as a fighting bird and it's still largely a wild breed of chicken. This isn't the chicken for you if you're looking for a family-friendly bird that will be receptive to handling and

close contact.

These birds need room to roam. They don't do well in tight spaces because their plumage alone can take up 3 to 4 feet of space. They will fight with one another and with other chickens if kept in cramped quarters.

Nowadays, Sumatras are primarily kept as show birds. These beautiful birds feature multiple colors that shimmer and dance across their feathers. You'll get the occasional white egg from your Sumatra, but the real reason people keep these birds is because of their looks.

Sumatra chickens are wild, restless birds and their call matches their attitude. If cooped up and unhappy, they tend to be very vocal. They quiet down a bit if allowed enough space, but they aren't by any means quiet birds.

Wyandotte



Figure 20: Silver-laced Wyandottes. By Holly from asheville, usa (pretty hens) [CC-BY-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)]

Just the Facts

Origin: American.

Type: Show. Can be used as dual-purpose chickens.

Size: 6 to 9 lbs.

Bantam Availability: Yes. Bantams weigh 3 to 4 pounds.

Price per Chick: \$3 to \$6 for both standard and Bantam sizes.

Health: Good.

Temperament: Friendly, but can get a bit noisy at times.

Egg production: Good. 200+ eggs a year.

Egg Color: Cream or brown.

Noise Level: Low.

Special Considerations: Roosters may have difficulty mating with hens because of their thick tail feathers.

Synopsis

This is a great choice for backyard chickens.

Wyandotte chickens are a popular show breed that can be used as dual-purpose birds. They're friendly and enjoyable to be around, which makes them a great choice for those just embarking on their backyard chicken journey. These birds don't just look good. They're good eating and are capable of laying more than 200 eggs a year.

The hens are good mothers that are somewhat prone to going broody. It can be a bit tough to mate the hens because roosters may have difficulty getting through their thick tail feathers.

There are a bunch of colors you can pick from when it comes to Wyandotte chickens. The following colors are some of the more popular choices:

Barred.

Black.

Blue.

Buff.

Columbian.

Laced. Blue, gold, buff and silver laced birds are available. Laced birds have either black, white or grey at the end of each feather.

Partridge.

Pencilled. Pencilled birds have bits of white and black mixed into their feathers.

Red.

White.

The only downside to Wyandottes is they tend to be vocal. They aren't loud, but they will cluck and they'll do it often. As long as you can deal with a low murmur, they're great birds to have as backyard chickens.

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