

Basics of Raising Backyard Chickens

Raising chickens in urban backyards is becoming increasingly popular in the state of Oklahoma. There are many benefits to raising chickens in the backyard including a steady supply of eggs, as a backyard method of pest control, to live more sustainably, and just for enjoyment. Many people find that by raising their own chickens they can ensure that their eggs or meat are organic and pesticide free.

Because of their small size and low space requirements, chickens are easy to raise in most backyards. The first step is to check local city regulations concerning chickens, as many cities may limit the number of chickens you may have or may even prohibit the raising of chickens within city limits. Some municipalities may allow for female chickens but ban the raising of roosters.

Your new chickens will need a home to call their own and many people enjoy building a chicken coop as much as they enjoy raising the chickens. There are many styles of urban chicken coops from simple and functional to fanciful and ornate. When building your coop, it is important to remember a few practical considerations. First, the coop should be large enough for proper air circulation, but small enough to keep your chickens warm. Typically, you should allow for 1 ½ to 2 feet of floor space per chicken. The coop should have easy access to food and water and should provide a space for the chickens to nest. A nesting box is very important as your chickens will need a secluded place to lay their eggs. Nest boxes should be 12 to 15 inches wide and 12 inches deep. There should be no more than five chickens per nesting box. You should construct a front panel to provide seclusion and to stop eggs from rolling out of the box and each box should have a nice layer of clean dry shavings to reduce egg breakage. You can also add a perch attached to each box to facilitate access. Make sure your coop is rodent and bird proof. You can add wire mesh under the subflooring to discourage varmints from digging into your chicken coop. All openings should be

blocked and windows and vent openings should be covered with chicken wire to keep birds out.

One of the main requirements for backyard chickens is a reliable and clean water supply. Water should be changed daily to reduce bacterial growth and to ensure that the water is not too warm. Each adult chicken can drink 0.05 to 0.08 gallons of water a day (1/2 gallon for 6-10 chickens); in hot weather, they can drink up to 0.08 to 0.16 gallons a day (1/2 gallon for each 3-6 chickens). Good feed is also important and all food should be kept where it is protected from moisture and rodents. Chickens can also be let free to forage, but should be offered feed as well for nutritional balance.

One of the main reasons people raise chickens in their backyard is to enjoy the eggs they produce. You do not need a rooster for your chickens to lay eggs. The main element that affects egg production is light. Laying hens require at least 14 to 16 hours of light a day to maintain good egg production. In fall and winter, artificial light can be used to continue egg production when the daylight hours are shortened. Four to five hens will provide two to four eggs per day and chickens can begin laying eggs when they are around 5 to 7 months old.

Finally, remember to be a good neighbor. Chickens do not always respect property lines, so ensure that your chickens stay confined to your property. Make sure that chicken waste is cleaned up and does not cause a smell nuisance to your neighbors. Although typically there is little risk of disease that can be passed on from chickens, proper handling of eggs and poultry carcasses is recommended to reduce potential contamination. Wash eggs before bringing them into the house.

Further information on raising chickens in the backyard can be obtained from OSU Extension handout Backyard Flock Production [ANSI-8202](#).