Beginner’s Guide: Raising Chickens in Your Backyard

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Tonight’s Objectives
- Local Ordinances
- Determining a Purpose
- Breeds
- Feeds & Feeding
- Preparing for Arrival
- Daily Care
- Housing
- Predators
- Diseases
- Costs
- Purchasing Birds
- Additional Resources

Locals Laws and Ordinances
- It is important to check with your city before raising chickens in your backyard
- Some cities prohibit chickens in your backyard

Local/State Laws & Ordinances

Ordinances: City of Northfield
- For properties that are less than five acres, the keeping of six adult chickens is permitted provided that:
  - The principal use of the lot is as a dwelling
  - No person shall keep any rooster
  - The chickens shall be provided with a covered enclosure and must be kept in the covered enclosure or a fenced enclosure at all times, that may include chicken wire fencing with a minimum height of 18 inches
  - No enclosure shall be located closer than 25 feet to any residential structure on an adjacent lot

City of Northfield Zoning
- In regards to structures
  - Maximum size structure is 120 square feet or a building permit is required
  - Minimum of 5 feet from any property line
  - The structure cannot be placed in the front yard or in the case of a corner lot, in the side yard facing the side street
  - The property can only have a maximum of three accessory structures, that includes play structures, yard barns, detached garages, chicken coops, etc
The law doesn’t take vacations…

- For more information, please call or visit your local city hall:
  - Northfield: 507-645-8833
  - Dundas: 507-645-2852
  - Faribault: 507-334-2222
  - Lonsdale: 507-744-2327
  - Morristown: 507-685-2302

Product Sale Regulations

- In addition to regulations for simply owning backyard chickens, **if you plan to sell eggs or meat, you will encounter additional regulations.**
- The Minnesota Department of Agriculture Dairy and Food Inspection Division manages and enforces these. Contact them for information at 651-201-6027.

Now on to the fun stuff…

CHICKENS IN YOUR BACKYARD

Why do you want to raise chickens in your backyard?

- Understand where your food comes from
- Ready supply of eggs and/or meat
- Something to teach kids/grandkids about agriculture and responsibility
- Pets
- Lawn ornaments

General Terms

- **Chick** – baby chicken
- **Pullet** – young female
- **Hen** – adult female
- **Rooster** – adult male chicken
- **Cockerel** – male chicken under one year of
- **Straight Run** – mixture: male/female chicks
- **Brooder** – heat source to start young birds
- **Broody** – Maternal instinct to set or want to hatch eggs

Backyard Chickens: Meat Purposes

- **Meat breeds**: bred for meat production, they can lay eggs, but it’s not their talent
- Chickens can be market-ready in about 6 to 8 weeks from hatching
- Tend to be non-foraging…they will need extra feed. They like to eat!
Backyard Chickens: Egg Purposes

- Pullets begin laying eggs at 5 to 6 months
- Production is greatest for the first 2 years, declines after 3
- Takes 25 hours to produce an egg
- Won’t get an egg/day, but almost

Choosing the Right Chicken

- **Important to Remember:**
  - Are you looking for meat or egg production?
  - Or just a pet?

Which Breed is Right for you?

- Most common breeds (for backyards)
  - White Leghorn
  - Wyandotte
  - Rhode Island Red
  - Ameraucana
  - Plymouth Rock
  - Orpington
  - Cornish Cross

White Leghorn

- Excellent egg layers
  - White eggs
  - 250-300 egg/year
- 4.5 pounds
- Like to move about
- Good foragers

Wyandotte

- Lay brown eggs
- 6.5 pounds
- Dual purpose breed
- Great for small flocks
- Many color varieties

Rhode Island Red

- Lay brown eggs
  - Record: 364 eggs in 365 days
- 6.5 pounds
- Dual purpose breed
- Hardy breed
- Many x-breeds available
Ameraucana

- Great long-term egg prod.
  - Lay green eggs
- Many color varieties
- Dual purpose breed
- Tolerant to all climates
- Easy to handle

Plymouth Rock

- Lay brown eggs
- 7.5 pounds
- Best dual purpose breed
- Used in both layer and meat crosses

Orpington

- Lay brown eggs
- 8 pounds
- Large dual purpose breed
- Many color varieties
- Heavy size ideal for cold weather

Cornish Cross (The Meat Makers)

- “Broilers”
- Bred for meat production
- 8 pounds
  - Ready in 6 to 8 weeks
- Excellent carcass shape
- Very fast growing
- Can lay eggs — not their talent

Feeds & Feeding

A Chicken’s Diet (In General…)

- Grains, fruits, vegetables and insects
- Typically fed a prepared feed balanced for vitamins, minerals and protein
- Continual access to clean, fresh water
Feeding the Baby Chicks

- **Laying Hens**
  - Weeks 0-6: Starter with 18% protein
  - Weeks 7-12: Starter with 16% protein

- **Meat Chicks**
  - Weeks 0-4: Starter with 23% protein
  - Weeks 5-8: Starter with 19% protein

Feeding the Laying Hens

- **(Week 16)** A complete feed can be purchased from the local feed store, but a ration (recipe) should contain: (15% to 17% protein)
- If not included in feed mixture:
  - (Forages, Grain and Bugs)
  - 2.5-3.5% calcium (needed for egg development)
  - Crushed oyster shells
  - Grit (to assist with digestion)

Feeding the Meat Producers

- Need protein and energy
- Feed a complete feed ration with 19% protein for weeks 5 to 8
- Providing the diet through a complete feed mix will yield good results in a short time

One other thing on nutrition...

- Feed garden and table scraps
  - Don’t include things with strong flavors
    - Uncooked garlic, onion, etc.

Getting ready for your chickens...

- Video #1: Setting up the space
  [link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On_mvS5sFS4)
- Video #2: Moving chicks into the space
  [link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_N3fKqcMNI&feature=BFa&list=UUtXgdswjzbny14Fgya8yzEA)
- Video #3: Supplemental heat
  [link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dc4RnRdgcw&feature=BFa&list=UUtXgdswjzbny14Fgya8yzEA)

Preparation

- Consider having the chicks vaccinated at the hatchery against coccidiosis, it is cheap and will keep bird healthy! Otherwise use medicated feed.
- Provide a clean space, draft free, protected from predators
- Use bedding – wood shavings/sawdust are the best, but straw will work
  - Straw doesn’t absorb well, so it will need to be supplements with new straw frequently
Preparation Continued…

- Provide a heat source such as heat lamps
  - Chicks need 90° - 95° F in first week of life
  - Gradually reduce temp over 3-4 weeks to ~70° F
  - Fully feathered at 4 weeks – little or no heat
    - Except in really cold weather!
      - Infrared bulbs only heats the body of chick, not air around the bird.
        In really cold weather, it might be best to use a regular incandescent heat bulb

More Preparation Tips…

- Appropriately-sized feeders and waterers
- Dunk each chick’s beak into the water so they know where it is and how to access it

Daily Care

- Chickens need to be fed and watered (changed) daily
- Let out of the coop each morning and put back in each night
- Eggs should be picked up twice daily

More Everyday Chicken Chores

- Coop and pen should be cleaned weekly to maintain sanitation and control odor
- In hot weather, when birds are in the final 4 weeks of growth, and it’s over 85-90 degrees, pull the feed during the hottest part of the day.
  - Birds can be easily stressed by the heat and die during this period, especially if they eat heavily during the heat of the day

Everyday Chicken Chores

- Chickens need to be fed and watered (changed) daily
- Let out of the coop each morning and put back in each night
- Eggs should be picked up twice daily

Housing
Housing Guidelines

- Allow 3-5 square feet/adult
  - Far less to get started as chicks
- Need:
  - Feeding area with natural light, if possible
  - Roosting area (usually elevated)
  - Bedding (straw, shavings, cobs, etc.)
  - Nests: 1 for every 4 birds
  - Water

Housing Should...

- Only be limited by your imagination (and laws)
- Protect birds from predators
- Provide comfort
- Natural light is helpful
- Electricity is helpful
- Ventilation
  - Natural or electric

Housing Examples

Predators

Common Predators

- Raccoons
- Coyote
- Rats
- Fisher & Weasel
- Owls
- Hawks
- Dogs & Cats
- Skunk
- Red Fox
- Cats

Avoiding Predators

- An enclosed space for them to stay at night is essential
- Ensure that the coop is free from small holes for predators to sneak in
- If dogs and/or cats are a problem – either control them or fence in chickens
Diseases

• Diseases not typically a major problem
  • Coccidiosis may be the most common threat
    – Caused by a microscopic parasite infecting intestines
    – Most common in young chicks
    – Get diarrhea, usually die
    – Can use medicated feeds
    – Can use probiotics
      • Yoghurt – add water on new chicks
      • Feed for about a week or so

Diseases Continued...

• Don't fret the diseases
• Focus more on predators
• Death loss from disease should be low
• Provide
  – A clean, dry environment
  – Good feed
  – Fresh air
  – Sunshine

Costs

• Chicks: $1 to $3 each
• Feeder can be purchased or made
  – A few dollars/feeder
  – Make your own (rain gutter)
  – Waterers more expensive
    • Can use buckets, pans, old pots/pans
• Feed is most expensive cost
• Grazing and scraps will reduce cost

Purchase Locations

• Local farm supply store
• Feed: local grain elevator
• Fleet Farm
• Some hardware stores
**Wrap up…**

**Purchasing Birds**

- The table lists major chicken hatcheries, however there are also many individuals breeding and selling poultry. In some cases, local farm supply store may also order them for you.

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<tr>
<th>Hatchery</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tr>
<td>MURRAY McMURRAY'S</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mcmurrayhatchery.com">www.mcmurrayhatchery.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>STURMEN'S</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sturmenpoultry.com">www.sturmenpoultry.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOVER'S HATCHERY</td>
<td><a href="http://www.doovershatchery.com">www.doovershatchery.com</a></td>
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**Online Resources**

- [http://www.extension.umn.edu/smallfarms](http://www.extension.umn.edu/smallfarms)
- [www.backyardchickens.com](http://www.backyardchickens.com)
- [www.ansi.okstate.edu/poultry](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/poultry)

**Publications**

- **Backyard Chicken Basics**
  - by Betsey Wieland, University of Minnesota Extension Educator
- A number of books available here at the Northfield Library
  - *Storey’s Guide to Raising Chickens*
    - by Gail Damerow
  - *American Standard of Perfection*
    - by American Poultry Association

**My Resources**

- **Backyard Chicken Basics**
  - Betsy Wieland, U of MN Extension
- **Chickens in the City, in the Country, for fun and for profit**
  - Wayne Martin, U of MN Extension
- **Getting Started with Chickens**
  - Wayne Martin, U of MN Extension
- **Poultry Diets for Small Flocks**
  - IFAS Extension, University of Florida

**QUESTIONS?**

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