

The Lazy Farmer's Guide To Raising Chickens



**How To You Can Get Free Eggs,
Meat & Cash From Your Chickens**

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BENEFITS OF KEEPING CHICKENS

If you have decided to raise Chickens or are currently keeping some in your backyard, familiarizing yourself about the benefits can be very rewarding. You might have your own ideas already, but it shouldn't hurt to expand your knowledge on the pros of raising Chickens at home. After all, an advantage can only be one if you recognize it for what it is.

The following are the benefits one can have when raising Chickens at home:

Home-Kept Eggs Are Healthier. Scientific evidence suggests that battery eggs contain a higher amount of salmonella, and thus, can be very harmful to us through prolonged intake. There's a consensus among Chicken owners that the eggs their flocks produce is safer since they have full control of their poultry's diet intake. Raising your own Chickens ensures that your flock is getting a balanced intake of proper nutrients and vitamins paramount to producing eggs safe for human consumption.

You Can Save More Money From Home Produced Eggs. Having three or more Chickens that constantly produce eggs saves you the trouble of buying eggs at your local supermarket. A normal hen could lay an average of 300 eggs a year, provided that they are getting the proper nourishment. Increasing the amount of hens can also provide more returns, provided that you are buying poultry and Chicken feed at a cheaper price.

The Waste Products Of Your Chickens Can Be Utilized As Fertilizers. It has always been noted in many sources that Chicken waste is one of the best fertilizers around for its high amount of nutrients and nitrogen, which can help your garden produce vegetables at a faster rate. And the fact that they're organic makes your crops free from harmful chemicals. It's also a plus that your Chickens feed on bugs and insects that incessantly wreak havoc on your crops.

Chickens Make Good Pets. The hens, especially the "bantam" types, are docile in nature, not to mention that they are total beauts! Many types of breeds are beautiful in appearance, most notably Barred Rocks, Wyandottes, Orpingtons and Cochins. You can always go to the internet for photographs of certain breeds to decide better which breeds are to your liking. A Chicken's plumage has an overwhelming variety of colors, and I guarantee that you'll be having a blast just by sorting through them. Chickens, while not as smart as dogs, can be very playful and friendly. If trained real well, some of them can eventually pull off some tricks, and you might use them to impress your friends as they ogle over the beauty and magnificence of your Chickens.

There are still a plethora of benefits, and you can discover some of them on your own. Having the initiative to learn more and taking a humane approach to raising Chickens can pave the way to maximizing these benefits, and both you and your avian family will be happier for it.

BUILDING A BACKYARD CHICKEN COOP

Every design in building a backyard Chicken coop will involve three issues, how it will affect hygiene, Chicken productivity, and cleanliness.

Ample Spaces

In designing a Chicken coop the normal method for Chicken raisers is to allow 3 to 4 square feet of space per Chicken. The correct space will provide the Chicken enough room to mill about and to keep them more productive. Chickens are very social animals, they enjoy having other Chickens around, but they could also be cranky. When they are at their best behavior, Chicken will huddle together, scratch together and stay put if not feeding. When something fancies them though that they regard as little treasures, they could peck at another when an intrusion happens. It may not be much.

It could be a little droplet of water running across a wire, a territory that they are

foraging even when there are no signs of potential food morsels, just about anything. The Chicken sometimes could be cranky enough and peck at another sometimes to the death. This is sometimes complicated as when other Chickens see blood, they could help peck the hapless Chicken until most feathers fall or seriously wounded.

Ample space rules that out. When building a backyard Chicken coop then it is important to determine first the number of Chicken intended for the coop. When that is decided already, raise the planned Chicken coop above the ground to keep them healthy and for easier cleaning and maintenance.

Consider Ventilation

Chicken droppings contain ammonia and create dampness inside the coop. Aside from that every animal and bird has their own unique odor that stales the air. The design of the Chicken coop must allow proper air ventilation to keep the air inside the coop circulating. Choose the materials in the coop well as it could affect the proper

circulation of air inside the coop. Chickens are survivors but they are not exactly hardy. One death, often caused by dampness will affect the other Chickens to die also. Aside from ventilation, the Chicken coop must be insulated to keep the Chickens handle cold climates.

Food and Waste Management

Chickens leave droppings everywhere. When not well managed, the droppings emit gases that are not good for the health of the Chicken but could also bother people. When building a coop, provide perches designed along a feed spot. Chickens are one of those animals that are likely to poop while feeding. The perches and feeders should be designed for easy cleaning. When designing the feeders, raise the elevation as high as the Chickens' backs to prevent the Chickens scratching their feed and creating a mess when feeding.

This design is also the same for the water pans. Clean water must be available to the Chickens every day.

These are the basic elements when building a backyard Chicken coop. However, light sources are also an important consideration as well as the appearance of the Chicken house. These however depend largely on material choices and aesthetics. For Chickens, so long as they have a clean and steady feed, ample space, dry and with good ventilation, they are content.

BUILDING CHICKEN NESTING BOXES

Chicken nesting box designs come in all sizes and shapes. The suggestions for better designs also vary. The large variety of suggestions speaks so much about personal experiences and thereby the preference. In building Chicken nesting boxes, there are designs that stand out in view of practicality and function.

First though, a good Chicken nest box must be planned to get the Chicken lay eggs in manners that are most productive. The basics are the same. You build a box, put in some straw or wood shavings and when the time comes so too the eggs. But when there is low egg production chances are something must be done to improve the nest box. For as much eggs as possible, here are suggestions:

Often, Chicken nest boxes are built to house more Chickens and there are practical management reasons for this. The fact though is that when the nest box is crowded, Chickens prefer laying eggs on the floor where the eggs are dirtied, trampled on, and even eaten lowering production. Chickens are actually more productive when they nest on smaller boxes. A box that could house four Chickens at a time is good. Smaller is better. When nesting boxes are smaller, there is also less room for the Chicken to kick around the straw or wood shavings, creating less mess and keeping the straw where they should be.

The roof of the Chicken nest boxes are sloped for the purpose that Chickens do not roost on the roof. A roof not angled steeply will invite Chickens to roost there and when that

happens expect where the eggs will be. Inside the nest box, keep at least two inches of straw but if you could have wood shavings (pine is preferable) that is even better.

If you could provide a chute where the eggs will roll after being laid, and collected at a separate place, the added cost of the chute will be paid for in terms of more eggs that could be used. It will also be practical as frequent intrusions disturbs Chicken and that destroys eggs in the process let alone the muck that you will help splatter around.

In place of the egg chute, construct the Chicken nest box with doors constructed at the backside so that you could collect the eggs from outside the coop without disturbing the Chickens very much. Build a lip at the opening to prevent the eggs from falling when the doors open. A two-inch high lip is enough to keep the eggs safe. Likewise, build also a similar lip at the entrance to the nest boxes that serves as a Chicken step. This will prevent the eggs from falling from inside the Chicken coop as the Chicken kicks around before laying more. The lips will also keep the straw inside the nest.

The sizes in building Chicken nest boxes vary widely. In general though the height would be about 9" and if you intend to limit the Chickens inside the box, a 12" square is sufficient and let the nest boxes be cave like, cold and dark.

BUMBLE FOOT

Bumblefoot is the growth and accumulation of the hard tissues in the foot that gets swollen, is inflamed and may be painful to Chickens. Vets and pharma research terminologies explain technical terms and causes better, but for most of us these will only be gobbledygook and so here is how laypeople will see it and prevent it.

The symptoms

An abscess forms in the sole of the feet of the Chicken and often these are overlooked, as bumble foot in Chicken looks very much like calluses. The foot of the Chicken is swollen and often hard tissues build up. Then the Chicken starts to limp, where in more serious cases there is blood in the footprints. Bumble foot in Chicken could deform the feet severely but when detected early treatments are easier.

The Causes

Perches - Bumble feet starts with a bruise in the feet that results later to small wounds that are infected. These are due to the habit of Chickens to perch anywhere and everywhere that suits them. Perching in very narrow wires runs on floors made of wires and perching on narrow edges and sharp corners causes bumble feet. Another usual cause is jumping from

too high perches and landing hard.

Improper Nutrition - Bumble feet is also likely to occur when there is insufficient Vitamin A in the system. Seeds, a Chicken favorite are low in vitamin A. The vitamin promotes increases resistance to parasite infection aside from promoting digestion and appetite. An obvious sign that the Chicken lacks vitamin A is when the plumage lacks the usual luster, is pale, and is rough. There is also the lack of color intensity in the cere and there is yellowish and scaly accumulation on the beak.

Infections – The little wounds and lacerations on the soles of the feet, is a good breeding ground for parasites and bacteria that when left untreated will eat the bone, become acute and endanger the life of the Chicken.

Prevention – Provide good perching areas inside the coop and replace the Chicken run made of wires. Provide the perimeter where the Chickens are kept with perches with varying circumferences.

Chicken will eat just about anything and so they respond will with vitamin supplementation. Provide food that is rich in Vitamin A. Carrot for one is a very good source that the Chicken likes. Greens are also good sources of the vitamins and so are pumpkins and potatoes. Throw in vegetable and fruit peels, as Chicken loves this. It has been shown time and again that once the vitamin deficiency is resolved, bumble feet heals.

The Treatments – Antibiotics cures bumble foot. When the infection is not severe, the method is to clean the feet first in warm water for ten minutes before applying the ointment or the antibiotic. If the bumble feet is severe, soak the feet in warm water for ten minutes, use a sharp knife, remove the scabs working around it removing the scabs the puss until you are left with a clean hole, apply the ointment or the antibiotic, bandage the foot or use a vet rap and repeat the process every day until the bumble foot is healed.

CHICKEN FEEDING WORRIES

For people who are getting started with raising Chickens one of the main issues is the right Chicken feeding proportions, the heating of some of the feeds, the kind and the quality of the feed. Another worry considered seriously is the Chicken actually starving because the feeding failed in one way or the other.

No. In fact it is not. Chicken may be very low maintenance birds but they have survived longer than us and their population is several hundred folds over ours. True they are prone to diseases and pests but their population is a testament that Chickens are survivors. More so with hands that care.

Chicken will eat just about anything. They

will scratch for worms, they are happy with people leftovers; they love pellets, seeds and vegetables, peels, bugs and slugs. They are just as happy eating bread while pecking at a cockroach, and when something is not right with them, they will eat grass and even pebbles. They are most content when they range around for food and they will know what to eat and what not to every time. On the other hand, people could prepare the fanciest feed preparation for them but if they do not want it, they will avoid it.

So once in a while, if the size is manageable, let the Chicken roam around, with supervision of course. Because if Chickens are caged their diet is only as varied as those that are fed to them.

While the Chickens are in their pens, there are two types of feeds. The first and most important is the corn mixed with other seeds. The second is the pellets. There are three kinds of pellet feeds. The layers mash, the crumbled pellet and the pellets. These variations typically have similar composition. The different names are only to identify the grade of the milling. Layers mash for example is crushed to almost powdery consistency to

make it easier for chicks to peck and digest.

The crumbles are milled to rough consistency and are ideal for young Chickens and the pellets for the full grown. Chickens could get by very well with one measure of mixed corn with one measure of pellets. If you can throw in other food, they will pretty much eat that too and if they do, there is no cause for worry.

Chicken eats grit too. They need grit to aid their digestion. If you do not provide them that, they would be pecking pebbles. If you want that prevented, you could purchase that at farm supplier but you could very well make grit yourself. To do that, roast eggshells in your oven until they are brown, pound it (not too powdery), and mix it with their meal. One of the few things that you do not have to feed Chickens is preparing grit from oyster shells. Oyster shells, even when prepared in similar fashion to those of the eggshells will always have rugged and sharp edges.

Chicken feeding is never complicated. Simple steps like this could provide eggs for the table or for hatching. You will know if something is wrong when eggs are getting scarce but then you would easily find a way to correct whatever the cause may be.

CHICKEN FENCING THAT SAVES YOU MONEY

Buying pullets is the easiest they are also the cheapest. Chicken fencing? That varies, no matter how you look at it though, the cost of the fencing will add up to the cost of the Chicken. In high urban areas, raising more than a few Chicken would consequently raise eyebrows. In fact, you could be placing yourself in harm's way. Raising Chicken

in urban areas are more of pet raising. Commercial? Just don't.

When you are in a rural location with ample backyard space, keeping Chicken is a capital idea. Capital, literally. You see, there is fancy Chicken fencing, state of the art fencing and if you could afford electric fencing that is fine too, it would keep the chooks out and hem

the Chicken in. It will still add up to the costs though, but it is a choice, not a necessity. If you want to travel the frugal route, just as effective albeit not as pleasant to look at, were talking.

You will need corrugated galvanized iron sheets, Chicken wire, planks, and whatever means to build them. The idea here is as simple as protecting the Chickens and those flowers and plants that adorn the yard as much as keeping the predators out. When building, remember that Chicken scratches all over the dirt. To our chagrin, they love it. They could scratch near the fence and before you knew it, the fox and raccoons gets the idea and figures out a way to get their dinner easy.

The way to prevent this is to sink the bottom of the fence about 10" into the ground. The area near the fence is usually forgotten so don't. If that is not possible in some areas along the perimeter, sink 8" planks to prevent predators from scraping underneath. If foxes roam the area get the thickest Chicken wire possible. Foxes have teeth that are as sharp

as wire cutters that could easily cut through thin Chicken wires.

Normally animals could jump as high as their heads when standing on hind legs. Foxes are about four feet but do not bank on that. Foxes could jump as high as five feet so make the height of the fence a little higher just so the Chicken are on the safe side. This may not be as dangerous in hotter months when there is easier prey for the fox to pounce on but during colder months, the fox could hunt more aggressively and get a shelter besides. While at it, do not trim the wire at the top portion of the fence. Leave it rugged.

Use the GI sheets as further protection between the posts where you nail your Chicken wire. Nail also thick wire fencing around the portion of the wood with signs of wear to discourage chewing.

Chicken fencing such as this would not win you a prize for best Chicken fence design. But bet your neighbor's dog this will win you savings. Bunches of it!

CHICKEN PARASITES CAUSES AND TREATMENTS

Chickens in general are a hardy lot, but they are also very susceptible to various Chicken parasites, infestations, and diseases. All of this though could be avoided very easily provided the symptoms are recognized early and treatments are done swiftly. Not acting on it soon enough could cause infestation that could contaminate the entire flock.

Causes of Infestation in Chickens

- Overcrowding Chickens produces stress that results in lowered resistance against diseases. It also makes the Chicken prone to parasitic diseases and infections.
- Introduction of new birds into the flock without first quarantining the new birds is one of the

most common sources of infestation. When additional Chickens are needed the best way is to quarantine first the new flock in a separate cage for two weeks and examining and treating them for possible infections before being introduced to the main Chicken house.

- Poor sanitation breeds different kinds of bacteria that the Chicken is susceptible. The Chicken house must be cleaned regularly from manure, dirt, dampness, and waste food to insure that the Chicken house is sanitary.

Common Chicken Parasites and its Treatments

Lice – While lice does not actually bite the Chicken but instead eat dead skin, Chickens are very uncomfortable with it that results in the Chicken pecking at themselves that causes irritation and wounds. When other Chickens see the blood, it attracts their interest that they would peck on the Chicken also resulting to depression and death. Introducing other birds that are infected to the Chicken house usually transmits lice. To treat lice, spray the infected Chicken with sulfur based dust sprays. Malathion solution baths are also effective.

Red Mites – Breed fast in damp and dark areas. A Chicken that is infected with red mites that goes undetected will spread the mites fast to other Chickens and will number several millions in a few short days. It could also spread to your other pets, to your house and breed on your beddings. Red mites feed on blood and causes death in Chickens when not treated swiftly. The mites are transmitted to the Chickens by wild birds and by rodents. Red mites are blackish red in color and will hide from light. When there is evidence of red mites in the area, a Chicken bath in Malathion could cure the Chicken but all hiding places of the red mites must be disinfected if not burned.

Scaly-leg mites – You will find scaly-leg mites in between the scales of the leg of the fowl. Once they penetrated the scales, the scales would lift and will cause lameness in the Chicken. Unlike the red mites, scaly-leg mites come from infested ground. Brushing the Chicken leg with warm soapy water to rid the mites and then painting the leg with a mixture of methyl and olive oil in equal parts plus half a part of kerosene will kill the mites. Make sure though that the solution penetrates the scales.

Fowl ticks – These Chicken parasites are very similar in nature and treatment to the red mites. The fowl ticks however produce tick fever, paralysis, and death when unchecked.

CHICKEN SOUR CROP PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

A Chicken's crop is just below its neck and at the center of its chest. This is the Chicken's food storage and also where the first stage of digestion takes place. Often, a Chicken eats more than it could digest, when that happens the Chicken develops a sour crop.

Detection and Symptoms

You would know if the Chicken has sour crop if there is a bulge at the center of the chest of the Chicken (often bigger than a golf ball) making the Chicken very uncomfortable and moving the head in a funny sort of way. When you open the beak, there is often a sour, foul smell. When you touch the Chickens crop

and there is that hard yet squishy feeling, sour crop is setting in if it is not yet impacted. What complicates this is that even when the Chicken appears to be lethargic; it will still try to eat even when the crop is full, then the Chicken suffers more.

Prevention of Sour Crop

The crop is a vital organ in Chicken that you have to keep a close watch on. As Chickens are likely to eat just about anything, sour crop usually occurs. When Chickens feed, the crop will normally bulge. But then a healthy Chicken with a crop that is working well will have emptied the crop overnight. If the crop has not, there is something wrong with digestion. To aid digestion, the Chicken feeds on grits. Grits are bought in any farm and poultry supply store, the grit is then mixed with the Chicken feed that aids digestion.

Normally, healthy foraging Chickens will swallow small pebbles. They know what to select and what is good for them. However if the Chicken is not let out of the coop for long periods, they miss this digestion aids. Another thing that is common to most animals is to eat a particular grass for a particular

illness. When the Chicken has sour crop, the Chicken feels the illness and will forage for grass. This often complicates the sour crop, as long strands of grass are harder to digest.

To prevent the onset of sour crop, check the Chickens once in a while as the crops are likely to be empty every morning before they feed. Observe also the kind of grass that the Chicken feeds on when they have a sour crop so you can chop the grass into smaller sizes and feed this to the Chicken to treat the sour crop or when a similar problem occurs in the future.

Once a month, mix one teaspoon of apple cider vinegar to every liter of water in the Chicken's water supply. When you do, buy the vinegar from farm shops and not those sold in the supermarkets.

Treatment

Hold the Chicken upside down to induce vomiting. Massage the crop gently to release the food that is stacked. This should be done with rest times to prevent the Chicken from choking and the liquid from entering the

respiratory system. Feed the Chicken with live yoghurt mixed with chopped grass, pellets and apple cider solution. You may repeat this for a few days until the Chicken is relieved.

GETTING STARTED- THE PECKING ORDER

Keeping Chickens is a practice that dates as far back as when people started domesticating animals. They are fun to have around, are a good food source, and are low maintenance. If you have an ample backyard the idea of keeping Chicken may have occurred to you but needed a little more information before getting started.

Of Hens and Roosters

You do not need a rooster. Keeping a rooster is a matter of choice but not actually a necessity. While having these handsome, brassy, noisy, aggressive characters to have around your hens is an attractive choice, the hens are quite content not having a rooster that keeps mounting them as they can lay eggs without the help of

the rooster. Chickens are sociable birds. They want to hang around each other most times and cuddle around each other on cold days. You may need only one Chicken for a pet however, Chickens are happier when in the company of Chickens. If you want to keep a few have at least two or three.

The Hen House

Where there are hens, there are predators. Chickens will be happy to be strutting around free range-like but sooner, without a place to roost, you'll end up losing some. In the country, they attract a lot; in the city they attract rats let alone cats. The hen house then is a good area to shelter and raise them. There are fanciful Chicken pen designs that are available everywhere if

you do not want to go through the trouble of building them. Fancy Chicken pens are good and attractive accessory to your backyard. There are however the basic elements to have for a good Chicken house. First, Chickens love having dust baths during the day. They do it all the time so they must have access to dirt where they can scratch and dig and have fun.

The Bigger the Better

While Chickens are not territorial, they need also their spaces. Crowding them would result to pecking at each other, sometimes even to death. They do this to protect those that catch their fancy. For example, they'll start pecking at another Chicken if it goes too near a string of water droplets running

through a hanging string that caught their interest. To prevent overcrowding, allow at least three square feet of space for every Chicken. During colder days when they will be huddling hang grass and vegetables that they eat to keep them occupied.

Settling Down

Other people prefer buying pullets and raising them, others want to start with hens. No matter, they will be brought inside their pens to familiarize them to the Chicken house. Once there, do not let them out for a while. The Chicken has to know very well where the home is otherwise, they will be roosting

on branches, roofs, awnings, anywhere they feel safe.

One thing you'll learn about Chickens is that they enjoy people leftovers and would fight over it. Their normal fare though is Chicken pellets and clean water.

KEEPING CHICKENS AS PETS

Chicken by nature are evasive of human contact as most animals and birds are. Chickens raised as pets would not tend to run away as much when the bond and the trust have already been established. They would not mind too much the stroking and the cuddling when truly acclimatized to human contact. The Chicken may run to you when they know that you bring a treat but that is just as far as it usually goes.

The evasiveness is not totally lost. From time to time, even, with the best care, they would try to steer clear of people. Staying clear out of people and other animals is its natural inclination and often its only defense to survive longer. To raise Chicken as pets that will follow you around, seek your company and even nap in your lap, hand raise the Chicken while still a baby chick. When the chick is handled gently and treated well, good bonding results, so does trust.

Chicks are one of those gentle precocious creatures and they are fun to watch and nice to have around. They could very well eat whatever little morsels given to them and walk around after hatching. Very young chicks though will need a heat source. In

place of the mother hen, that provides the heat by gathering them under the wings, you will need a lamp as their source of heat.

You will also want a place to keep them. Young chicks would fit well in a shoebox or something similar so long as there are small openings for ventilation. Stuff the box with paper towels, as they are easier to replace daily. Clip the lamp in the lip of the box and cover it with cloth to regulate the heat. Ideally, the heat inside the box should be warm to the touch but not exceed 90 degree Fahrenheit.

The chick will also need layers mash or starter mash inside the box and clean water. Provide the water in a shallow dish weighed down with pebbles to keep the water from spilling as chicks would scratch and walk about in the box. You would know if the chick is uncomfortable or hungry when they peep loudly, when not, the chick chirps contentedly. As the chick grows, food consistency will be different. Starting from a starter mash, it will need crumbles and then pellets. This is no cause for worry though as the feed is basically made of the same mixtures and components, the differences accounts for the

degree of coarseness of the milling only.

As the pullets grow, it will eat just about anything that catches its interest. It will also need a dirt run, preferably a sunny spot, to take dirt baths on. For this reason, it is best

to supervise its activity if you have a garden, as it would peck at grass as well as the next Begonia.

Keeping Chickens as pets is great to those who love its very sociable nature.

KEEPING CHICKENS FOR EGG PRODUCTION

There is never any doubt that keeping Chickens for their eggs is not only an enjoyable endeavor, but also serves to provide owners with a lot of profit. If the idea of raising egg-laying hens has entered your mind, a comprehensive plan that involves quality of feeding, proper environment, and stress management should be undertaken to get the best results for egg production.

But before we proceed with a contingent plan, an introduction to the fundamental facts involving the laying of eggs should be tackled. This can depend on a lot of factors.

When it comes to breeds, the leghorns start the earliest in laying eggs, which usually takes approximately 5 months, while the bantams and silkies start in about 8 months. Using this knowledge will help you prepare

accordingly before the eggs start pouring in. Take note that hens that have just started to lay eggs do so in haphazard fashion, but will soon start to get their normal rhythm as the days go by. Commercial hens usually get replaced after two years, but some owners, especially those who keep their hens as pets, collect eggs even from those that have already reached the last stages of their lives. This won't pose a problem since hens are still very capable of laying eggs even in their later years, albeit a lot slower, until it eventually stops.

There are specific reasons on why Chickens suddenly stop laying eggs, and owners need to be aware of the signs so that they will know when to act accordingly or when to let things take its natural course.

MOLTING

Molting is the process by which Chickens shed their feathers so they can grow new ones. This normally happens during the autumn/fall, and takes about a month. Once they've grown new feathers, egg production should start as normal.

BROODING

There comes a time in the cycle of a hen's life when it starts to stay in its nest box without moving much. This is called brooding, which can cause your hen to stop laying eggs for some time. It takes about two to three weeks before the hen can snap out of its "catatonia" and start laying eggs again.

STRESS

It's been proven that the least stressed hens produce better eggs, and that stress affects the quantity of eggs a Chicken can produce. A favorable environment and constant companionship for your Chickens can alleviate this problem.

Chickens have an internal mechanism to keep themselves warm. This expends some energy, which is normally used for the act of laying eggs. Be sure to set up a heat lamp in the coop during winter so that your Chickens can have more energy required to lay eggs.

As was stated before, egg production starts to decrease, as a Chicken gets older, and stops in its fifth year. If this happens, we should give the hens enough courtesy to deem them 'retired' and just allow them the luxury of living out the rest of their years with their happy disposition in mind. Hey, after all the eggs they've provided, it's the least we could do!

KEEPING CHICKENS FOR MEAT

Chicken meat has always been a popular food choice to us consumers, and while it is easily accessible in any supermarket, keeping Chickens and raising them yourself for future meat consumption has been common not just in the farm, but also in urban areas. Aside from getting free eggs, an owner can have full control of the flock's dietary intake, giving him full confidence that the Chicken meat he produces are free of harmful chemicals.

Before getting started, it is frugal to choose carefully the breed you're going to raise and take into consideration the cost of feeding and rapidity of growth. If you are putting emphasis on the size of the meat, you can go for the Sussex and Plymouth breeds. You can always opt for the hybrids if you want to go in-between. While these are more sought out for meat consumption, there are still a lot of breeds out there that you can choose from. The internet is chock full of information about breeds, so it is imperative to do a bit of research to decide on what type of Chickens you want to keep for its meat.

You have two choices when purchasing Chickens. Either you go for the full-grown ones (after checking the vaccination records to ensure that there's less risk of disease) or you can go for the newborn chicks. Just keep in mind that chicks require eight weeks of feeding before they are ready for slaughter. It is also wiser to buy a few cockerels so that your hens can spawn fertilized eggs and produce the next generation of Chickens that can replace the ones that are soon to be consumed.

You will need to set up a coop for your flock to settle in, preferably one that has wheels, to make it easier to move around the backyard or garden. Regularly moving the coop enables you to choose a spot where they can feed on weed. In this manner, you can prevent them from damaging any crops that you want to protect by veering the coop away from the spots they're growing from.

Regular cleaning is also recommended to prevent diseases. Chickens love to perch, so

don't forget to install a place where they can roost. Most of all, the coop should be safe from drafts and extreme temperature.

Your poultry requires daily intake of water. An automatic watering device is a great tool for water distribution because you can set its timer to release drinking water in particular times of the day. It's also easy to clean and has an adjustable height for the growing chicks.

Chickens being raised for meat need a lot of protein in their diet for their growing needs. Their feed is made up of 90% grains, such as oats, barley, soybean meals, canola and other oilseed meals and grain legumes. Meat Chicken diets are within strict nutritional standards. If you want to ensure that your Chickens are having the required balance of nutrients, you can purchase Nutribalancers from feeding stores.

KEEPING CHICKENS HEALTHY

As the old adage goes, "health is wealth", and it brings home the point when one considers the importance of keeping our bipedal companions free from diseases or any debilitating illness. After all, we constantly require eggs and Chicken meat from them, so it goes to show that the general health of the poultry can be important to sustain our own.

THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT

The general well being of a Chicken starts with the environment. While it's true that Chickens adapt real well to both cold and hot weather, constant exposure to harsh climates can still get the best of them. That's why a coop or a hen house should be set up, while making sure that it's well ventilated and free from draft. Make sure that the perches are not too high to prevent any foot injuries. Keeping the Chicken house devoid of moisture also helps prevent diseases that

result from ammonia and other toxic gases.

And of course, you have to maintain cleanliness in the coop and its surrounding environs to prevent the proliferation of mites, lice and other critters. These pests can cause serious health risks if left alone. Regular cleaning through the use of clean water and disinfectants should always be undertaken to maintain a healthy environment for your Chickens.

PROTECTION FROM PREDATORS

Chickens are delectable treats for any predators prowling the area around the coop. To ensure the safety of your hens, make sure that the coop and the fence around it is well sealed. Do not settle for just any wire to build the fence, and use one that is durable. The

fence should be high enough that even high leapers can't jump over it, and its bottom buried deep enough (20 inches at the very least) under the ground to prevent predators from burrowing underneath.

PROPER FEEDING AND WATERING

Just like with any livestock, Chickens need a well-balanced diet and a daily intake of water. A watering device is a great tool for providing drinking water due to its timer and operant conditioning capabilities. Chickens have a formulated diet that depends on their

needs as befits their age and what they're meant to provide. You might do well to do some research on the recommended diet for your Chickens to ensure that they are getting the proper nutrition they require.

GIVING CHICKENS THEIR SPACE

Not giving Chickens enough space to move about or "free-range" can induce a lot of stress in them, which in turn becomes detrimental to their health. Crowding can also lead to lots of fighting inside the coop and will eventually run the risk of some Chickens getting seriously hurt. Remember that each Chicken should have a two square

foot of shelter and a three square foot of run area, so take note of the amount of space you have in your back yard when choosing the amount of Chickens you want to raise. If there's not enough, then make sure to clear enough space for them to run about as soon as possible.

KEEPING CHICKENS IN THE CITY

Chickens could be kept in many urban areas, in some Chickens are less welcome. If the intention however is to keep one as a pet, that is already accepted practice. Some are even keeping reptiles for pets but just to be on the safe side, check for local laws and regulations. The local animal control office in your municipality would know how many you can keep and whether that would include a rooster. The main deterrent here is that these birds may fall under noise ordinances and so check out first as it is very easy to be emotionally attached to these birds. In Urban areas that used to be a farming community, the ordinances are more relaxed. Either way, keeping Chicken in the city does not require a license.

When the issue of ordinances is out of the

way, decide the kind of Chicken that you want and for what purpose. If pets are what you want, you would settle well with bantams. Bantams are Chicken breeds that are about one fourth of the size of a regular Chicken. It is very much like having toy dog breeds. Example of the bantam breeds that are good for pets are the Barred Plymouth Rocks and the Rhode Island Reds as they are mild tempered. If you want a good layer bantam, you would do well with a Cochin. The Buff Orpington on the other hand is a larger bantam breed and is very friendly too. These are only some of the excellent choices. There are many more choices to select on when you surf the net.

You may want your pet Chicken to roam around the house, even sleep in the bedroom

but the Chicken would pretty much prefer its own coop to roost and its own nest box to lay eggs on. You can always build one using the materials that you already have or are readily available at a local farmers market or hardware. When you do, allow a two feet square space for every bantam. The Chicken will also need a place to roam; they could be cranky when they do not besides it is good for them. Allow eight square feet for the bird. Chickens are very sociable.

They prefer to huddle together with other Chickens. Having that in mind, keep at least two Chickens. Likewise, double the spaces allotted to them because even when they are sociable, they could be cranky at times

especially when they feel crowded and might start pecking at each other. Remember also that Chickens do not need a rooster to produce chicks. Expect then and make provisions that they would multiply soon if you would not need all the eggs they produce.

Remember also that keeping Chickens in the city will attract predators. Bantam Chickens have no way of defending itself against cats. If you love cats, it would be most likely that you know your cat is not the kind that would attack and could live side by side with a Chicken. Rodents however are a different issue. When you build a Chicken coop, insure that the coop is very well secured and could never be accessed by these predators.

KEEPING CHICKENS WARM IN WINTER

If you are worried about your Chickens freezing during the winter, keep in mind that you only have to take minor precautions to keep them warm. Remember, Chickens normally acclimatize themselves to cold weather. In fact, their physical constitution is more tolerant to cold than to heat. The body warmth they get from simply huddling together during cold weather can go a long way into keeping them warm for most of the winter. However, it doesn't mean that it's safe to neglect the environmental conditions that determine the well-being of your poultry during the cold months.

Heat conduction plays a critical role in the wintering of your poultry. Placing a bed of sawdust or bundles of straw in the coop helps in keeping them warm just in case huddling together is not good enough to handle the cool temperature. Setting up

a heat lamp in a secure place also helps in providing direct heat just in case a particular Chicken has poor tolerance for extremely low temperatures. Just make sure that the heat lamp is at a safe distance to prevent your Chickens from getting too close (Chickens like to perch, so make sure the heat lamp is at an elevated area that they can't reach).

A coop that is dry and free of draft (but still ventilated) is very essential to maintaining reasonable heat within the shelter. One thing to avoid is barring the door since Chickens love to go outside and exercise every once in a while, even during winter. Make it a point to clear the coop's surroundings of snow in order for your Chickens to have the luxury to venture outside whenever they feel the urge to do so.

Proper feeding is very important during a Chicken's winter days. Corn is a good supplementary diet since it provides internal warmth. And of course, water needs to be provided daily just like in summer days. I highly recommend using a hard horse rubber dish for the fact that it's relatively easier to remove the ice without breaking the dish.

Providing roosts is also vital in avoiding your Chickens' toes from freezing. A roost made out of wood is always better than metal or plastic because wood doesn't conduct cold. The roost should also be wide enough so that the Chickens' feathers can cover the toes and be able to provide warmth into them.

Combs and wattles on Chickens can be a big problem since extreme coldness can cause frostbites. Rubbing Vaseline regularly can be a big help to alleviate this particular problem. You can also resort to "dubbing", which is the process of removing these extra appendages, in the means to fully remove the possibilities of frostbites and the complications that go with it.

Remember that the rules change if you are brooding chicks. They should be kept entirely safe from drafts by placing a solid wall around them. Maintain a heat lamp over them the same way you do with full-grown Chickens. If you can't establish an airtight habitat for them, it is best to avoid the notion of raising them in the winter.

KEEPING CHICKENS FROM EATING THEIR EGGS

Chickens love to peck. Normally though they do not peck their own eggs but when it starts and nothing is done to keep them from doing it, they would develop the taste of the eggs and the habit could form. To prevent Chickens from eating their eggs, try the following.

Feed your Chicken grits. Grits are purchased in your local farm supply store or you could make your own. To make grits, roast eggshells until they are brownish and crunchy. Pound the shells and mix it with Chicken feed. Chicken that does not have enough calcium in their diet will try to find it elsewhere and eggshells are an alternative source. Make sure that the feed has enough calcium and protein.

When an eggshell is weak, it could easily break and when it does, the Chicken will

start pecking on it. Weak eggshells are signs that the Chicken lacks Vitamin D3, protein, calcium, or has an infection. Check for infection aside from feed composition.

When there are no infections and the feed is sufficient, it could be that the nest box is too hard. Provide padding for the nest to prevent accidents to the egg even when the Chicken shuffles and scratches around the nest box. Keep the nest box dark. Chickens are less likely to keep on moving around in darker places. Dark nest boxes keep the Chicken relaxed. When hens are less agitated they are less likely to trample on eggs. Limit also the number of Chickens in a nest box. A typical nest box could accommodate four hens. Fewer hens for every nest box are better.

Do not feed the eggshells to the Chickens. Gather the shells and clean up the coop, likewise, do not feed the dirtied eggs to Chickens. Introducing the Chicken to the egg will start them developing a taste for it that could start the habit. Chicken could also start pecking at the eggs if they are bored. Keep them busy by hanging vegetable scraps tied to a string for them to peck.

Collect eggs as often as twice a day if you can. That way you could monitor the production of the eggs better. When the eggs are reduced, and the causes are eggs that were pecked on, isolate the Chicken pecking on the eggs. You could find that out when a

Chicken has egg residues in the beak. When the Chicken is isolated, feed the Chicken with liquid milk for a while. If isolating the Chicken is not possible, try trimming the upper beak.

Another method to prevent the Chicken from eating their eggs is to place golf balls in the nest box. Pecking on a golf ball will discourage the habit from forming. If you have done this and the egg supply does not return to normal, find out if rodents are getting into your nest box. Whatever the case though, prevent the Chicken from tasting their eggs because when the habit is formed, it will almost be impossible to break.

PRODUCING HIGH QUALITY CHICKENS

The effort to produce high quality food sources and quality farm products has been a major focus in all sectors of the food industry. For the average man working in the poultry industry, the changes, complexities, and practices in producing high quality Chicken eggs and meat could be stressful if not bewildering, but what happens in the farm determines directly the quality of the products that the poultry produce.

In egg production, the main focus of safety is to prevent salmonella contamination. It is also the ensuring that the chicks and pullets are not harboring the bacteria. One effective way at preventing this from happening is insuring that the feeds used are

free from pathogens. Regular vaccinations are conducted to assure that the flocks are healthy and the observance of proper sanitation, eggs washing and refrigeration is observed from the farm to the market.

Producing high quality Chicken eggs is straightforward. It only requires keeping healthy hens that are free from infection. The things to do:

- Reduce stress in the Chicken house. Chickens that are not over stressed are more resistant to infections. For this the Chickens must not be disturbed, if that cannot be avoided, prevent disturbances to the least possible. Chickens are naturally evasive to contact from those that it is not familiar with, even unfamiliar human scent.
- Except for scheduled management and maintenance, the supply of water and feed must not be interrupted. Even when the Chicken can do with yesterday's water, the water supply

nonetheless should be as clean and uncontaminated as possible.

- Maintain ample spaces for hens. A layer would need 4 to 5 square feet in moving space. When hens are crowded, irritations between hens occur that leads to pecking and fighting disturbing egg production.
- Make sure that the Chicken house is secured from other animals and unauthorized personnel. Contact with poultry must be minimized.
- Do not feed broken eggs to the Chicken. Doing so will develop the habit and will start them pecking at eggs. Instead, clean the Chicken house of all residues of the eggs and dispose of it immediately.
- Keep a clean Chicken house. Cobwebs, dust, dirt, and broken eggs harbor bacteria. This includes good housekeeping in all aspects of egg production like, egg packers, conveyors, elevators, and egg belts.
- All eggs must be collected promptly. Collecting eggs twice each day works well for most farms. For bigger farms the collection must be done often.
- Eggs must be handled carefully to prevent cracks, washed, and refrigerated soon afterwards.
- It often happens that pesticides are to be used to aid sanitation and cleaning. In this case only use pesticides that are approved for egg production. Likewise, use chemicals only when necessary.

The above-mentioned guidelines are sufficient practices in producing high quality Chicken eggs. For further assurance, a common test is to place the eggs between a light and the eye. The yolk of high quality eggs appears translucent. Those that appear cloudy are already stale and may no longer be fit for consumption.

PROTECTING CHICKENS FROM OTHER ANIMALS

Chicken has a lot of attributes but unlike most animals in the food chain, except for their typical if not initial distrust, they have none for defense. Aside from that, Chickens do not move fast, are noisy, meaty, and tasty, that makes them the ideal bird to prey upon. To protect Chickens from predators and other animals, observe try the following.

Introduce human smell. The scent of humans is very repulsive to animals. It has often been claimed that the reason that man is the least to be preyed upon is due to human smell. There is not much study to support this but the fact is man will only be preyed upon when a predator is starving and there is nothing else available, when a predator is sick and is unable to hunt or is very old that their movement and ability has been limited, when the animal is

threatened with its back to the wall and escape routes are closed and sometimes when a man is mistaken for another identity. To do this, hang bags of hair and used clothing inside the Chicken coop and the fence preferably near entrances.

Discourage predators from your premises. This will depend much on the predators that are in your area. Different predators use different methods. Consult with the animal control or the local authorities in your area. Aside from that you could use chemical deterrents. An electric Chicken fence may also be ideal. Outside of these, remove places and clear spaces where predators could hide. Having dogs around will discourage most predators from getting near the place.

Build sturdy Chicken coops. Build the Chickens living spaces free from gaps and holes. If the flooring of the Chicken house is made from slats, install wires underneath to prevent predators from digging from underneath. Cover weak posts with wires to prevent them from biting through and lock up the Chicken hutch without fail when the Chickens are roosting in their coops.

Prevent access. Predators will dig underneath a fence if they could not jump over it. When building the fence, ensure that it goes at least 10" or more below the ground to discourage digging. See to it that there are no weak points either in the fence or in the Chicken house itself.

Provide barriers

When the fence is made from Chicken wire, bury planks that are at least 8" deep into the ground, also put footplates near the fence. Make the height of the fence at least five feet to prevent foxes from jumping over. Leave the top of the fence rough for added measure. Generally foxes could jump as high as their length. There are foxes though that could jump more than that. Leaving the top of the fence rough could catch if not scrape their underbellies on it.

Other methods of protecting your Chicken from other animals could be provided by other farmer/residents in your area who have been raising animals longer than you have.

WHAT CHICKENS NEED TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE

Ancestrally, Chickens are jungle birds. They are survivors living in trees and are good at adapting to outdoor conditions. Taking good care of Chickens then is easy provided that the Chicken raiser give them what they need to survive and thrive. The needs of Chickens are few and simple.

Housing

- The first among the basics for raising Chickens is a housing that is clean and secured from predators. Chickens are a good prey for foxes to badgers and for cats to rats. The Chicken house then should be secured that every possible entry point of predators are closed and barred.
- Build a Chicken house that is elevated from the ground. This will keep them away from damp and diseases. While Chickens are sturdy birds, they are prone to bacteria and diseases, many of which come from the damp ground.
- The Chicken house should also be made of materials sturdy enough to withstand different weather conditions and it should have ample ventilation.

Space

- Provide enough space for Chickens. Chicken could be a irritable creature when the mood strikes them and that could be just about anything. When they are, quarrels will start. When blood is drawn, the blood will strike the fancy of other Chickens in the henhouse will start pecking at the bloodied Chicken sometimes to death. A Chicken house is already cramped when there is less than three square feet of space per Chicken.
- Likewise, the nest box should not be designed to accommodate more than four Chickens. Two Chickens per nest box are good.
- Chicken runs should be secured and fenced around with the base of the fence buried at least 10" into the ground while the height should be at least five feet.

Food and Water

- Chickens could live on yesterday's water but when the water has droppings it has to be cleaned. A steady supply of clean water is essential if the Chickens are to be healthy. Vitamins and minerals could also be introduced into the water to boost the Chicken's immunity from diseases.
- There are two basic types, the corn, and the pellets. Corn feed is mixed with other seeds and the seed mixed to the corn does not differ much from one manufacturer to the other. The other type is pellets. Pellets have three categories. First is the starter mash or layer mash, the second is the crumbled pellets that are recommended for feeding the pullets and the third is the pellets. There is no difference in composition and nutrients present. The difference only lies in the manner of fineness and coarseness of the feed.
- Chicken eats most food and it is good to let them roam around for variety. Chickens should also be fed grits, as they would need this for digestion to prevent having a sour crop.

These are the basics that the Chicken will need to survive and thrive. There are other minor issues like disease prevention, selecting the breed, laws and regulations, but for Chicken keeping, these are the things that come first.