

## BACKYARD CHICKENS FOR BEGINNERS



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## ABOUT ABLEVEG

- New vegetable garden planning and design
- Custom raised beds and raised bed kits
- Private Consultations to plan, troubleshoot, and improve production
- Plant planning and placement diagrams
- Gardening classes
- Gardening resources page
- Seeds, tools, and more! One stop shop for garden essentials.



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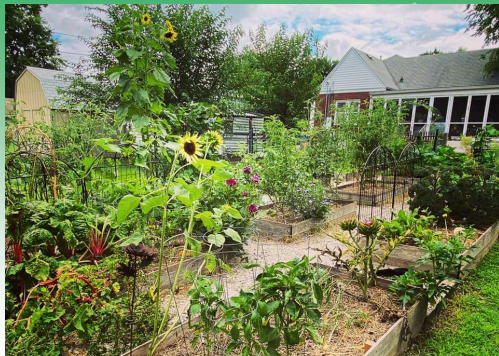
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## ABOUT ME



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## ABOUT ME



## WHY KEEP BACKYARD CHICKENS?

- Fun backyard companions
- Eggs! Fresher and healthier
- Great pet for kids
- They are fun to be around and watch
- Utilize kitchen scraps
- Cut down on insects
- Treat your birds with respect
- You can make more bad jokes about being "eggcited" and have a "clucking good time"



## A BIT ABOUT CHICKENS

- They are NOT stupid
- They have unique personalities
- They are very curious
- They are very food-motivated and trainable
- Great vision! Their eyes have violet cones
- Chicken language consists of 24+ different distinct sounds
- Have a definite pecking order and abide by those rules
- Detect object permanence



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## GETTING READY FOR CHICKENS

- **Zoning, Ordinances, and HOA's**
  - Many areas allow chickens but only certain numbers; there may be regulations regarding housing, location, roosters, etc.
- Check with your neighbors
  - Let them know what you are planning
  - Make them aware they need to keep pets away
  - Bring them eggs



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## BASIC CHICKEN NEEDS: COOP

Chicken coop with nesting and roosting areas that can be locked

- Building? Buying?
- QUALITY is important
- Location is important
- Size is very important
- Ease of Cleaning



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### BASIC CHICKEN NEEDS: RUN

- **Chicken run to allow them to exercise and possibly roam and forage, preventing boredom**
  - How many chickens? Need 4 sq. ft. of space per chicken
  - Durability of materials
  - Easy to clean
  - Door(s)
  - **Moveable? (Chicken Tractor)**
    - A separate tractor/run can be added for more free ranging and predator protection

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## PREDATOR CONTROL

- **Predator Proofing**
  - Don't rely on chicken wire
  - Think of all predators: dogs, hawks, raccoons, snakes, cats, foxes, coyotes, opossums etc.
  - Make sure chickens are locked in the coop at night
  - Hardware cloth over every opening
  - Use an "apron" or hardware cloth
  - Cover the run and fully enclose
  - Provide hiding spots for free range birds
  - Get a flock guardian animal




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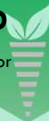
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## BASIC CHICKEN NEEDS: CHICKEN FEED

- **Feed** is often tailored to meat birds, laying hens, free-range hens, or other ages/types/lifestyles
- **Types of Feed**
  - **Pellets:** Chicken feed is made into pelletized form for ease of use and decreased waste.
  - **Crumbles:** Pellets that have been reduced to chick size pieces
  - **Mash:** Mash is basically unprocessed feed for chicks or adults, fed dry or wet.
  - **Fermented:** Mixed with water and allowed to ferment
  - **Medicated:** Feed that has been treated with a coccidiostat to help chicks to overcome any possible attack by coccidian protozoa
  - **Un-Medicated:** Chick feed without a coccidiostat
- **Grit:** Sand, pebbles and other particles chickens naturally ingest. It is stored in the gizzard and helps with digestion; some debate when it is necessary. We usually leave some out as a choice.




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## WHAT NOT TO FEED CHICKENS

- Food scraps high in fat or salt
- Rancid or spoiled food
- Avocado
- Chocolate
- Onion
- Garlic
- Citrus fruits
- Uncooked rice or beans
- Junk food



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## SELECTING YOUR NEW CHICKENS!

- **Chicks?**
  - They are so cute!
  - Raising them can be fun
  - Can be shipped to pick specific varieties
  - Extra work
- **Pullets**
  - Old enough to be sexed but less than a year old
  - Can also be shipped
  - Can go right out to the coop
- **Adults**
  - **Adoption**
  - **Rescue**
    - May not be laying
    - Must quarantine for 6+ weeks
    - NOT meat birds

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## I ONLY WANT HENS!

- **To help ensure you receive hens:**
  - Order chicks that have been sexed (not 100% correct)
  - Get pullets or hens that you can already ensure are female (6-8 weeks old)
  - Get varieties that are sex-linked
  - If you end up with a rooster Facebook and local groups can help rehome. Look at options before getting your chickens.



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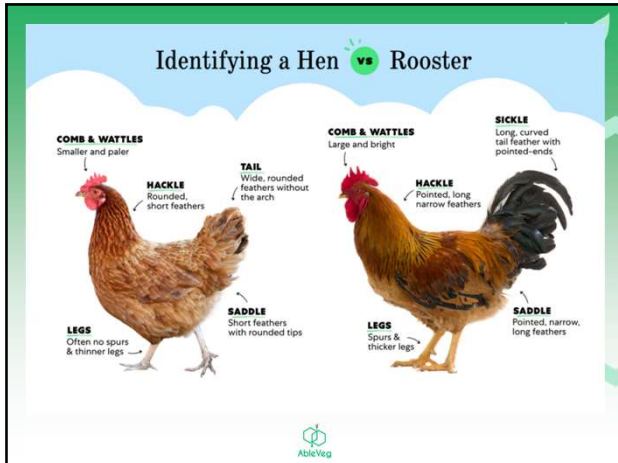
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### WHY KEEP A ROOSTER?

- They are great at their job
- They look out for the hens first
- They make different sounds
- They perform for their hens
- Beautiful animals
- They regulate hen pecking order drama



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### WHY KEEP A ROOSTER?



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## SELECTING YOUR NEW CHICKENS!

- [www.MyPetChicken.com](http://www.MyPetChicken.com)
- Rate of egg laying
- Cold and/or heat hardy
- Foraging space or containment?
- Friendliness
- Broodiness
- Other personality characteristics
- Mix flock or not?
  - Egg size and color
  - Will they lay in winter?



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## PICKING YOUR BREEDS

[www.MyPetChicken.com](http://www.MyPetChicken.com) Breed Selector Tools  
and Info for chicks, hatching eggs, and pullets

Breed	▼
Price	▼
Size	▼
Shipping Date	▼
Egg Color	▼
Personality	▼
Egg Quantity	▼
Abundance	▼
Heat Tolerance	▼
Cold Tolerance	▼

Chicken Breed List

Baby Chick Supply  
Checklist

Hatching Egg &  
Incubation Guide

Chicken Care Guide



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## RATE OF EGG LAYING

- Rate varies throughout the year and over the lifetime
  - Will stop laying after 3-4 years
- Hens lay anywhere from 1-2 to 5-6 eggs per week
  - No definition of what an "excellent" or "good" layer is
- Some hens won't lay in winter
- Egg size can be very small all the way to jumbo
  - Weight dictates what qualifies an egg to be a certain size at the store



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## EGG COLOR

- **Egg color varies**

- Colors can be blue, green, white, and shades of brown from light to chocolate
- Some have speckles as well
- Colors are added to the egg in the hen's shell gland pouch
- Egg pigments are darker at first and lighten over time
- If you want to "candle" your eggs darker ones are harder to see
- Eggs can be lighter if the hen is stressed or if it is very hot



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## EGG COLOR



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## COLD HARDINESS

- Does not necessarily mean the breed will still lay eggs in the cold
- If you are in a VERY cold climate (AK, ND, Canada, High elevations) get cold hardy breeds only
- Cold hardy breeds tend to have smaller combs and less bare skin, as well as thicker, sometimes darker feathering and heavier bodies



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## HEAT HARDINESS

- Does not necessarily mean the breed will still lay eggs in high heat
- These birds have fewer feathers, large combs, exposed earlobes, big wattles, long exposed legs, lower body fat, and light colored feathers


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## FORAGERS V. SMALL SPACE

- **Foraging space or containment?**
- **Foragers**
  - Some chickens are naturally good at hunting for insects, as well as other creatures like snakes, voles, and mice (think of them as tiny dinosaurs)
  - Foraging hens may produce more nutritious eggs
  - Usually these breeds get bored and restless in small spaces and would not be happy confined to a run, may display behavior issues
  - They may be more likely to leave your yard – Flying!
- **Chickens less likely to be good foragers**
  - Some breeds just aren't good hunters
  - Many are perfectly happy hanging out in a chicken run or smaller space
  - Note: this does NOT mean they are happy in a tiny cage or small, cramped coop




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## DOCILITY, FRIENDLINESS, AND PERSONALITY

- Different breeds have different general characteristics (think different dog breeds) but, like dogs, not every member of that breed is the same
- When reading reviews, know they are subjective
- Look into different sources and ask around for recommendations
- Keep in mind consistent handling and interaction is a big part of how social your chickens will be


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## BROODINESS

- **Can describe a behavior or a breed tendency**
- This is the desire to sit on and incubate eggs, induced by hormones
  - Hen may get territorial and peck
  - Can steal eggs from other hens
  - May not want to leave to eat and drink
  - Will stop laying eggs
  - To break this cycle, lift the hen off the nest several times a day or remove her from the nest(s) completely
- **A broody hen is ideal if you want to hatch eggs!**
  - You want a hen that not only goes broody but is attentive and a good mother
  - Give her a special space
  - Great broody breeds: Silkies, cochins, Orpingtons, Old English Games




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## OUR FAVORITE BREEDS

- **Golden Buff/Red Stars**
- **Silkies (Bantam and Standard)**
- **Cochins (bantam and standard)**
- **Australorps**
- **Easter Eggers**




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## MIXED FLOCK OR ONE BREED?

- **Mix flock or not?**
  - Benefits: lots of color and personalities, you can find the breeds you love the most, easier to tell birds apart, it's fun!
  - Cons: if you have a single breed and introduce a new breed to adult birds they may pick on the ones that don't look like them, some may not be great layers, may have different habits
- **If introducing new breeds**, make sure to do it safely and gradually, using a fence to separate initially
- **Birds can be added to the coop at night.** Often the existing flock assumes they have been there all along




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## MAKING YOUR FLOCK FEEL AT HOME

- Keep the coop and run clean and comfortable with adequate roosting space for sleeping (they like roosting off of the floor at night)
- Keep water and food fresh
- Make sure there are no holes where they can escape
- If you live in an area where you don't want them flying, clip wings once the feathers are grown in and after every molt is done
- If introducing new birds to your flock, quarantine for 6 weeks, then gradually introduce them through a barrier or watch closely




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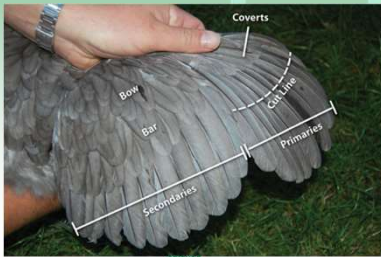
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## WING CLIPPING

- Will help keep birds safely in yard
- Wait until the bird is calm (night) and have an assistant
- Identify the primary feathers and clip a couple inches from the base
- **MAKE SURE THERE IS NO BLOODFLOW**
- Clip only 1 wing



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## KEEPING CHICKENS COOL

- Ensure there is adequate shade
- Provide dust bath areas
- Utilize misters and fans
- Make sure the coop has good circulation (can add screen doors)
- Provide cold water
- Give them cool, high-water content treats (watermelon, cucumber, lettuce)
- Freeze their feed
- Give them a wading pool (NOT a swimming pool)




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## KEEPING CHICKENS WARM

- **DON'T ADD A HEATER!** Unless your temperatures are well below 0 degrees Fahrenheit/-17 Celcius
  - Only use a heater made for coops
- Provide deep bedding
  - Give them a "greenhouse" if there isn't room in the coop
- Give them indoor toys
  - Hang cabbage
- Use petroleum Jelly on wattles/combs
- Shovel pathways in snow
- If the coop is too large create "rooms"
- Insulate your coop
- Provide warm food before bed
  - Cracked corn, oats
- Keep water unfrozen




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## BASIC BABY CHICK CARE

- **Make sure they have food and water right away** and it is refreshed every day
- **Give them grit** as soon as you give them treats
- **Spot clean their cage daily**
- **Check the heat lamp daily** – if the chicks move far from the lamp they are too hot; if they huddle right under it they are too cold
- **Start moving them outside at 6 weeks old** if it is at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit/10 degrees Celsius




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## BABY CHICK SETUP




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## FIND A VET

- **Need to Specialize in Poultry/Exotics**
- Chickens don't need checkups, but they will sometimes need medical attention
  - Ask yourself if you would be willing to perform humane euthanasia; if not have a 24-hour vet on hand
- Have a first-aid kit handy
- Recognize they are not like dogs or cats – medical attention may differ
- Remember, chickens are livestock, even if you love them dearly. Expect some loss.




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## OBSERVING CHICKEN BEHAVIORS

- **Molting**
- **Scratching**
- **Pecking Orders**
- **Sun and dust bathing**
- **Mating**
- **Nesting box turmoil**
- **If a chicken is acting strange**
  - Check for injuries
  - Watch for scratching or sneezing
  - Watch to see if they are eating and drinking
  - Quarantine if necessary
  - Check with a vet if necessary




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