



Like other birds, a chickens' diet is very important to good health. A chicken allowed to scratch through soil will find bugs and, during the spring, new vegetation. These are good additions to the diet, but not enough to fulfill nutritional requirements. Contrary to popular belief, hen scratch is not a good staple. It is made primarily of carbohydrates, and is described as "candy for chickens." A good all-purpose poultry pellet, supplemented with produce, (scraps of fresh veggies and fruit are perfect), will supply most of the needed nutrients. Medicated feeds are generally unnecessary.

Hens also need a calcium supplement to stay healthy during laying periods. The most common, and thoroughly adequate, is oyster shells. Giving a hen eggshells will result in continual eating of eggs laid. The laying season will run throughout the period when the daylight hours are at least twelve hours.

A lack of calcium and exercise or too much fat in the diet is often the cause of egg binding. This is a fatal condition that needs immediate treatment. If your hen is sitting ruffled up and holding her tail down, she might be unable to pass an egg. Keep her warm and take her to a vet. Once you have been shown by an expert how to deal with this problem, you will probably be able to handle future occurrences.

Like all beings, chickens need fresh water. Both water and food should be placed in sanitary dishes to augment disease control. Be careful of galvanized containers, these cause zinc poisoning.



Chickens! An Overview of Their Care.

Distributed By
The Sanctuary

Created By


a community celebrating life!
P.O. Box 144 Creston CA 93432


a community celebrating life!



Chicken Care

Chickens are simple creatures. They need food, water, protection from man made hazards, predators and weather, freedom to scratch in the dirt, take dirt baths, crow and cluck to their hearts content. Ok, so maybe they aren't so simple. Let's look at

the basics.

Chickens are fairly territorial. They are very unlikely to stray from home. When they do it is usually because there are more roosters than the flock can handle. The strongest rooster may drive the weaker away. Even then, the outcast will stay close to the flock. He will sneak back in at twilight and take advantage of any unsuspecting females. At which point the other roosters, to show their dominance, will also take advantage of the same hen. This can be dangerous for the hens, and so keeping a balance is important. The general rule is to have one rooster per fifteen hens.

A roosters' job is to watch over the hens. Even if he has only one female, a rooster will stand near her through the day as she scratches in the dirt for morsels, and takes dirt baths. He will crow throughout the day, letting the world know, "he's the man!"

He will also crow in the middle of the night. This may be why so many roosters end up at shelters. If one is going to have chickens, a good space between neighbors is necessary. Roosters are illegal within city limits. So before one buys an Easter chick or two, one must be ready to deal with finding a home for the ones who grow up and found to be males. Despite feed and pet store claims, chickens are rarely sexed properly when young.

To keep chickens, guardians must provide adequate shelter that is predator proof. Chickens can be allowed freedom outside of the shelter, because they will return to the same place nightly to roost. They will also scratch through any, and all, areas they have access to, so giving them freedom means putting new seedlings in a garden at risk of being gobbled up. If a gardening project is desired, one will want to fence it in or give the chickens a fenced in area of their own to stay in. An area that is twenty-five feet by twenty five feet is probably adequate for three chickens. At The Sanctuary, we have found that the main flock will stay within a one fifth of an acre area, even though they could get into other areas. At the time of this writing, the main flock consists of twenty-three hens and two roosters. Another five hens and two roosters, make their way out of the general area, yet stay close to their nighttime lodgings.

Chickens do need a roosting bar of some sort. They will not stay on the ground at night. Roosting bars are as simple as a two by four board.

Hens also need boxes lined with hay or straw, to lay eggs in, though they may lay eggs behind objects placed against a wall, or in the odd available corner. Eggs not retrieved by guardians will eventually be sat on.

Shelters will need periodic cleaning. Roosting bars and hen boxes will need scraping. The



Good news is that the waste cleaned up will be very good for the garden!

Chickens are susceptible to attack by raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, and dogs. They are most vulnerable at night, and so a closed shelter is warranted.

There are also tiny predators that chickens must be protected from. Lice and mites will easily infect a flock unless steps are taken to prevent this from happening. Diatomaceous Earth, which can be found at most garden centers, can be scattered liberally over the floor of the shelter to prevent infestation. If chickens pick up either of these bugs, sevin dust, available at garden centers, applied to their feathers will kill the parasites. A crusty appearance on feet is caused by another bug and can be cleared up by coating the feet and legs with vegetable shortening.

Chickens are very good at finding strings and twine that will entangle their feet. Keeping these items away from chickens is important.



These are not the only disease issues chickens face. Guardians must watch for respiratory illness, fungus infections, and egg binding. Early treatment is essential, so chickens should be watched for changes in behavior. Chickens should generally be active and alert. Coughing or gurgling when asleep is a sign of illness. A fluffed up chicken in a corner away from others is probably very sick. It is important to have a good avian vet to turn to when illness strikes.

Questions?

The Sanctuary
800.906.2445

or save us a dime and call

805.227.0205

thesanctuary@kindplanet.org

www.kindplanet.org