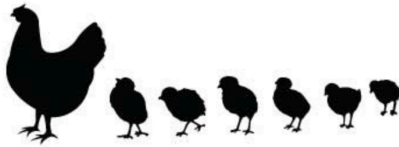


# Getting Started with Backyard Chickens



## Why do you want chickens?

This question helps determine what kind of breed you choose for your needs:

\*Eggs      \*Meat      \*Pets      \*Kids      \*Both Eggs & Meat

### Best Breed Ideas for...

Eggs only Red Star/Sexlink (280+) Australorp (250+), Leghorn (220+)

Meat Cornish Cross Ready to Process/Eat 4-6 weeks

Pets Silkies, Orpingtons, Polish, Plymouth Rocks, D'Uccles, Easter Eggers

Kids Buff Orpington, Brahma, Silkies, Cochins, Australorps, Easter Eggers

Eggs & Meat (Dual Purpose) Rhode Island Red, Plymouth Rock, Black Star

## Get Ready BEFORE You Bring Them Home:

Where will you get your chickens? Breeder, Hatchery, Farm Store, Poultry Swap, Neighbor, Hatch Your Own Eggs, etc...

Pullets are baby hens – females

Cockerels are baby roosters – males

Straight Run is a mixture of both. Usually 60% male, 40% female

### If you are ordering them in the mail from a hatchery:

Chicks can live up to 3 days on the yolk from their egg. Survival rate decreases after 72 hours. Visit or call your local post office and tell them the date you will be receiving the chicks and give them your phone number. Remind them the day before your chicks arrive. Many post offices will call between 5-7am. Otherwise, your chicks will sit in the post office and go out with your regular mail creating more stress for the chicks.

**ALWAYS set up your brooder BEFORE bringing them home.** This gives your heat source time to warm up and make sure everything is working properly. If using a heat lamp, use a thermometer to check the temperature to ensure it's correct for the age of the chicks. Week 1 95°, week 2 90°, week 3 85°, and decrease approximately 5° each week until they are comfortable in a 60° environment. Chicks that are too cold will ball up under the heat source. Chicks that are too hot will spread out and try to get away from the heat source. Chicks should be moving around all areas of the brooder. You'll want to get them warm, comfy and eat/drink as soon as possible after bringing them home.

**Brooder Supplies:**

Brooder – this is where the chicks will live for the first few weeks

Chick Feeder                      Heat Source (brooder panel or heat lamp)

Chick Waterer                    Bedding (pine shavings, hemp bedding, etc)

Chick Grit                         Chick crumble feed (organic, regular, medicated)

Something for them to perch on after the first week is optional but fun for the chicks.

**Splay Leg** – please do not use news paper or other surface for brooder bedding that will get slick when wet with water or chicken poop. This can cause Splay Leg. There is help for splay leg if this does happen but it needs to be treated as soon as possible or the chick may never walk.

**Pasty Butt** – Pasty butt or chick pasting up is a common reason for a sick baby chick, most often caused by stress. This is a condition where poop droppings stick to a chick's vent area, preventing excretion of waste/poop. The condition is easily treated, and recovery can be quick if action is taken promptly. NEVER PULL OFF THE STUCK ON POOP/WASTE!! You can badly injure or kill the chick.

**Electrolytes** can help with stress in newborn chicks. Some mail order chicks will come with a pack of vitamins/electrolytes. Electrolyte packets are good to have on hand at all times. 'SAV-A-CHICK Electrolytes' and 'Nutri-Drench' are sold at all farm stores and online. Use one packet per gallon of room temperature water. There are also online recipes to make your own.

<https://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2017/02/homemade-electrolyte-recipe-chicks.html>

**Coccidiosis** – coccidia is the common term used to describe a group of parasites called protozoa. It is naturally occurring in our soil and ground water. For poultry, the biggest source of coccidia oocysts can be found in the coop bedding/litter and run area. Since coccidia can be found naturally in the environment, chickens can become infected when they forage in the yard. A chicken ingests the oocyst, passes into the chicken's digestive tract where the oocyst then transforms into a second developmental stage and seeks out the intestinal lining of the chicken host. In the warm, moist environment of the chicken's intestines, the coccidia rapidly develops into its replicating phase and explodes in population, causing damage to the intestinal lining of the chicken. At this point, the chicken may begin to show some clinical signs as the coccidia infection advances. Acute symptoms such as bloody diarrhea, listlessness and poor weight gain may be evident. CORID is a common medication used to treat coccidiosis. CORID blocks the levels of Vitamin B1/Thiamin in your flock so the B1 must be replenished after treatment. Probiotics can also be given to help heal their guts. Check to see if your hatchery vaccinated for Coccidiosis. If your chicks are vaccinated, DO NOT feed medicated feed to your birds.

**Chickens are a commitment just like any other animal. Chicks need a lot of attention in the first few weeks. It's a good idea to have a chicken first aid kit. What will you do if one is injured? How will you care for it? What if one is injured and you need to cull it? Vet help? What if you get an unwanted rooster?**

**Other Information** \*\*It is best to get your chicks when you can spend the first few days at home with them to monitor their health. \*\* Chicks frequently kick shavings and/or poop into their water. The water must be changed and cleaned after each poop incident. Keep an eye on their food dish as well. \*\* They will sleep a lot for the first few days. It's been a rough journey! \*\* A newborn chick uses its egg tooth to get out of the shell and will lose it from the tip of their beak usually by the end of their first week of life. \*\* Chicks may start 'dust bathing' in their bedding/litter \*\* Get them used to your hands and voices if you want to keep them as pets or have a friendlier flock. \*\* Around 3-4 weeks, introduce them to outside if weather permits. \*\* You can introduce treats and start training your chicks starting week 2-3.

## **It's Time to Move to the BIG COOP!**

When your chicks are between 5-8 weeks old (depending on the breed), it will be time to move them outside to their new permanent home... the Coop! Chicks are smelly and make a lot of dust by this point. They are also flying! Having the coop ready BEFORE you bring home your baby chicks is ideal. You can build your own or buy a coop. There are endless options available! You can find homemade coop ideas from online chicken groups. There are also blueprints available with supply lists. Your coop and run should be a one time investment. Spend as much as you can comfortably afford on quality and predator protection. You'll thank yourself later - peace of mind is priceless! Also around 5 weeks of age, you'll be switching the chicks from Starter Feed to Grower Feed. I like to gradually mix them together until eventually it's just grower feed.

### **Coop Essentials:**

- \*Predator Proof Fenced Run area - minimum 10 ft.<sup>2</sup> per hen, more for larger breeds
- \*Roosts untreated 2"x4" or tree limbs work great! 10" linear space per chicken
- \*Adult Feeder - access 24 hours a day in run only, not in coop
- \*Adult Waterer - access 24 hours a day in run only, not in coop
- \*Grit - chickens will eat what they need to digest their food
- \*Calcium - hens will eat what they need, feed freely
- \*Bedding - pine shavings, hemp bedding, construction sand, pine needles, dead leaves
- \*Nesting Boxes - 1 box per 3-4 chickens, 12-14" W X12-14" H x 12-16" D
- \*Pop Door - access door from coop to run, manual or automatic doors are an option
- \*Dust bath - necessary year round to help keep mites, fleas, lice, and other bugs from harming your flock. The dust bath area needs to be kept dry year round. Good ideas are a mixture of dirt from your yard, ashes from a wood fire, sand, and Food Grade Diatomaceous Earth (DE). You can find more ideas online.
- \*Ventilation, but not a breeze, is necessary to keep the ammonia from building up inside the coop. 'Sweet PDZ' can be added to their bedding to help with ammonia.

If you are able to build your run and bury hardware cloth several inches underground in a "J" shape, your flock will be safer from ground predators such as raccoons, foxes, coyotes, pet dogs, etc. A covered run will help keep your flock safe from arial predators such as hawks.

## We Found an EGG!! Now What??

Any where from 4 to 7 months of age (depending on the breed), you will one day find an egg! This is an exciting time! All the time, care and handwork have paid off! At this time, start switching the flock from Grower Feed to Layer Feed. There are many options for layer feed. Find a feed that best fits your family's needs (organic, non-gmo, conventional – pellets, crumbles, fermented feed, mash).

### 2023 Average Start Up Cost for Raising Backyard Chickens (6–8 Hens) for 1 YEAR

**Coop** \$300 and Up

**Run** \$150 and Up

**Feeders** (chick and adult) \$25 and up

**Waterers** (chick and adult) \$25 and up

**Feed** \$300 and up – depends on type of feed: organic, non-gmo, conventional

**Shavings/Bedding** \$240 and up

**Grit** (chick and layer) \$50

**Calcium** supplement \$50

**Nesting box pad material** optional \$220 (10 pads \$30, change weekly)

**Brooder Panel** \$70 and up

**Heat Lamp** Red Bulb \$20 Heat Lamp Amphibian no light \$30

**Brooder Box** – Free and up – Some examples are clear large tote, large watermelon box, build one from wood and fencing scraps, old play pen or my personal favorite “Chicken Condo” Collapsible Pet Play Pens on Amazon or Chewy.

My name is Kristan Marchewka and I'm the “Chicken Whisperer” of the PT area. Our family started with 16 chickens 6 years ago because our daughter wanted them. I read every book I could get my hands on to learn about them before bringing them into our family. (I didn't want to accidentally kill my daughter's new pets!) We did not realize how friendly they could be! They were social from the first week. We were essentially their parents. We taught them how to eat/drink and spent time with them – held them, talked to them, the kids read books to them. Chickens were an amazing pet for our family because we are allergic to everything with fur! Fast forward 6 years later, We've had over 100 chickens come and go. I “Foster to Adopt” both roosters and hens. Not a day goes by without a phone call, a text message, or a FB/IG message about chickens! I love educating people about chickens. They are our “feather puppies”. I work one-on-one with people helping them to get started with backyard chickens. Please call me if you'd like to hire me to get you completely set up with your new flock (I do everything except the coop, I don't build coops at this time). Thank you for joining us today!!

Kristan Marchewka

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