

Chickens

Chickens can make lovely pets with many people taking on ex-commercial hens to give them a good quality of life in their retirement with the bonus of many of them still laying eggs!



1. Look before you leap! Before you consider keeping chickens, check if it is legal to do so. If you live in a rural area this shouldn't be a problem, but if you plan on keeping chickens in your back garden you may be subject to city ordinances. Different cities will have different rules, so check with your local authority or call animal control.
2. Get your neighbours onside. You may find yourself apologising for noise (even without a cockerel), so keep them sweet with a good supply of fresh eggs!
3. Know your limits. Be aware of the available space and time you can afford and don't get more chickens than you can manage.
4. Invest in a sturdy, well designed chicken coop. Getting this right from the start will keep your girls safe from predators and make managing your brood simple and stress free. Make sure they are locked up at night to stop foxes getting to them.
5. If you are new to chicken keeping choose a hardy breed, such as the Sussex, and take time to source good healthy birds to make sure you get off to a good start. Alternatively, consider re-homing some ex-battery hens.
6. Establish a routine for cleaning and maintaining the coop – remove all bedding and spray with a mite product at least monthly. Droppings should be removed twice a week and straw replenished. This should keep your girls clean and happy.
If they take their time returning to the coop at dusk it is likely to be caused by a red mite infestation. This is easily treatable with a variety of products.
7. You should worm your girls 3-4 times a year with a veterinary approved product
8. Health Awareness:
 - Her comb should be red, plump and glossy
 - Her keel should be well padded with flesh either side
 - Her vent should be nice and clean
 - Her crop should fill up when she eats and slowly deflate afterwards (if it stays firm she may be impacted)
 - Most importantly her demeanour – she should be active, eating, drinking well, preening and scratching.
9. Always provide plenty of pellet food and clean water. Supplement with kitchen titbits: Left over pasta, boiled vegetables and potato peelings. You should not feed anything too fatty or any meat. Also no beans or onions as it can make the eggs taste funny. They will enjoy a handful of corn in the morning and it will help to keep them warm during the winter nights.
10. Hang up greens around the run to keep them entertained and this will also help to take focus away from the lower ranking hens in the flock and reduce bullying.

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