How to Raise Chickens for Eggs

Five Parts:Planning a Chicken CoopMaking a Chicken Brooder/CoopChoosing ChickensRaising ChickensGathering Eggs

Part**1**

Planning a Chicken Coop

1

Find out if it is legal to raise chickens on your land. Many cities have ordinances against raising chickens in city lines. Go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPxxyJ8Cscw to find out if there are laws in your state or your locality.

- It is a good idea to search for town ordinances **and to check with your homeowner's** association. They may have additional restrictions.

- Most cities have stricter laws about roosters than chickens. If you want a rooster in order to grow chickens for meat, you may have more trouble.

2

Talk to your neighbors. Chickens make a fair amount of noise. In order to quell their fears, choose not to have roosters, if you have close neighbors.

- Although chickens will still squawk, they will not crow like roosters.
- Consider offering your neighbors free eggs every few weeks. They may be more amenable to the idea if they reap some benefits. [1]

3

Ensure you have enough time in your schedule to care for chicks and chickens. You will need to stay at home the first day the chicks arrive, and clean and harvest eggs most days of the year.

4

Set aside an area in your back yard for the chicken coop. If you are raising the birds from chicks, you will have a little bit of time to build it while they grow. If you are buying older hens, you will need the coop immediately.

Making a Chicken Brooder/Coop

1

Buy a chicken coop before your chickens are 2 months old. Search online for people who make chicken coops in your area, and you may be able to pick up a newly made model to avoid shipping. You can also get plan to build a coop online.

- Look for a coop or design with lots of light, so your chickens will be happy.
- Choose a coop with a run, so that chickens can roam, but be protected during the day.
- You can buy a chicken coop from Amazon, Williams Sonoma, Petco and numerous other outlets.
- Find chicken coop plans at http://www.backyardchickens.com/atype/2/Coops.
- You can also buy a chicken tractor, which is a portable chicken run.

2

Reinforce your chicken coop. Predators, such as raccoons, mountain lions, bobcats and even dogs, can slip through cracks or underneath coops. Invest some money in extra chicken wire, nails and wooden or stone borders.

3

Prepare your brooder/coop before you bring chicks home. Add bedding, feeders and a heat lamp.

Part3

Choosing Chickens

1

Consider buying hens. They are often available in the fall, after people have raised too many chicks for their needs. However, it is hard to distinguish hens that are near the end of their egg-laying years (over 2 years old) from those who are young with many egg-laying years ahead of them, so vet your farm or seller well. [2]

2

Opt for buying chicks rather than hatching eggs the first year you raise chickens. Hatching eggs are available through purchase by mail order and in stores. While they may be cheaper than chicks, they may not have the sex determined and some eggs do not hatch.

3

Set up your brooder before you take the chicks home. A brooder is a heated nesting place that will keep chicks warm. They cannot regulate their body temperature for the first few weeks of life.

- Find a thick cardboard or plastic box. It should be smaller when the chicks are small, and then you should replace it incrementally as they grow.
- Place the box in an area of your house that has a steady temperature.
- Pour 1 inch (2.5 cm) of pine shavings into the bottom of the box.
- Place a heat lamp on the side of the box. Use a thermometer to keep the temperature at a steady 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius).

4

Purchase a chick waterer, chick feeder and chick starter feed from your local feed store. [3]

5

Buy day-old chicks at the local feed store or online. You can usually buy them between February and April. Look for "pullets" because they are female. [4]

- A full grown chicken between 2 months and 2 years old will lay approximately 5 eggs per week. In order to get a dozen per week, buy 3 to 4 chickens.
- Make sure your coop size is large enough to accommodate them. There should be 3 to 4 square feet (0.9 to 1.2 square meters) of space per chicken inside the coop and 10 square feet (3 square meters) of space per chicken outside the coop.
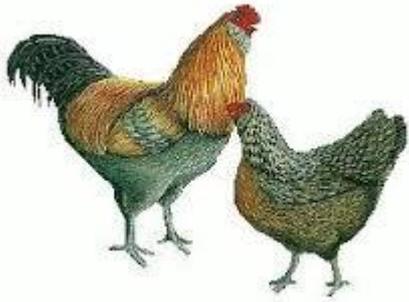
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Purchase several types of egg-laying chickens. A mixed group will provide varied sizes and colors. The following are some breeds to consider:

- Americana chickens, sometimes called "Easter Eggers" are prized for their colored eggs.
- Other popular breeds are Rhode Island reds, Cochin chickens and Barred Rocks.
- Breeds called Australorps, Orpingtons and Faverolles are considered "winter layers" so it may be worth buying them in cold-weather areas.
- Breeds that are considered "fancy" will lay fewer eggs. They are developed genetically for their looks rather than their egg-laying abilities.

Part4

Raising Chickens
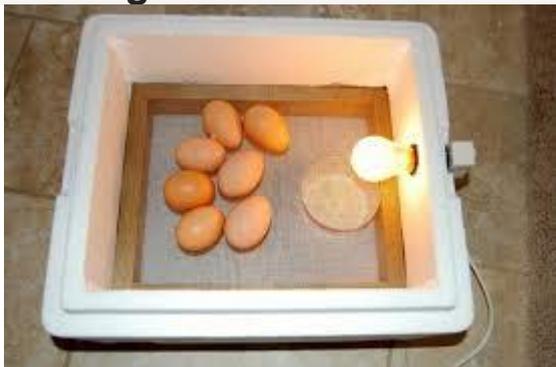
1

Move the heat lamp slightly farther away every week for 8 weeks. Keep it at 95 degrees the first week and decrease by 5 degrees each week until you reach 65 degrees (18 degrees Celsius).

- The week after you reach 65 degrees, you can take the lamp away completely.
- Keep a thermometer in the box so you can accurately judge the temperature. [5]

2

Dip the chick's beaks in water the first day you bring them home. They are possibly dehydrated and don't know how to drink yet. Keep an eye on water levels for the next few months to ensure they are staying hydrated.

3

Buy chick feed for the first few months. Chickens need food with a little sand in it, and baby chick crumbles have already accounted for this. When you replace chickens in later years, you can try mixing your own scraps with sand.

4

Move the chickens outdoors to their coop after 2 months. If it is still very cold in your area, you might want to wait a little longer.

5

Feed your chickens varied food to make deeper yolks. They can eat store-bought chicken crumbles, food scraps, insects from the lawn, night crawlers, grass and corn. Cracked corn is essential in the winter to keep their body temperature up.

- Free-range eggs have lower cholesterol and saturated fats than store bought eggs. They also have higher omega-3 fatty acids. [6]
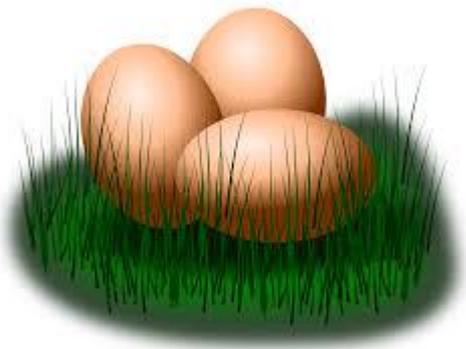
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Avoid letting your chickens roam free without supervision. Although you may want them to have freedom, they will become prey.

- Let them out to run around when you are doing yard work or playing in the lawn.
- Keep them in the run until nightfall, and then close up the coop.

Gathering Eggs

1

Place a fake egg in the nesting boxes of young hens. Make sure it is not a real egg, or they can get into the habit of eating eggs. They need to be shown where to lay their eggs.

- In later years, having chickens of varying ages helps teach new hens how to behave. Most sources suggest replacing 1/4 to 1/3 of the flock each year.

2

Gather eggs each day to free up the nesting boxes.

3

Wipe the eggs with a soft cloth, which removes mess, but not the anti-bacterial bloom on the egg. Mother hens produce this coating to protect their eggs from disease.

4

Store eggs at approximately 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7.2 degrees Celsius). They should be stored in the refrigerator rather than at room temperature. Warmer temperatures can promote bacterial growth.

5

Protect against salmonella. The following habits will prevent backyard hens from producing contaminated eggs.

- Wash eggs that are covered with chicken feces. Roll them around in a sanitizer with 1/2 oz. (14.8 ml) of chlorine to 1 gallon (3.8 l) of water.
- Eat eggs quickly. Older eggs have a higher risk of contamination as the egg white breaks down.
- Place chicken manure in a composter for 45 to 60 days before adding it to vegetable beds. Fresh chicken manure may contaminate vegetables with salmonella.

- Keep potentially contaminated eggs away from pregnant women, young children or chronically ill people, who have a higher chance of infection. [7]