



# Chicken House Guide

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# Benefits of keeping chickens



*Fresh eggs everyday*

## **Keeping chickens is fun and worthwhile, and it's one of the fastest growing hobbies in the UK.**

Before you start acquiring chickens, be sure to check the local planning rules and regulations. Some urban and suburban areas have strict rules against owning farm animals.

There are many benefits of keeping chickens; they make good pets, produce healthy eggs, and you can even use their waste as fertilizers.

### **Chickens are great pets**

Chickens species vary in colour, size, temperament, and personality. Bantam chickens are particularly docile and beautiful, making for great pets. Cochins

and Orpington chickens are known for their beautiful appearance and interesting personalities.

While chickens may not be as intelligent as dogs, some can be trained to do simple tricks. Most chickens are gentle in nature, calm, and an exciting addition to the family.

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## More benefits of keeping chickens

They are very easy to and simple to care for, requiring only 15 to 20 minutes of playtime a day. Chickens also consume many harmful bugs that can cause damage to your garden and home.

### Save money

Another benefit of keeping chickens is the money you will save from the healthy eggs they produce. A normal hen lays eggs for 4 to 5 years, laying an average of 300 eggs per year. Organic and healthier eggs sold at supermarkets can be very expensive.

By raising chickens at home, you can monitor their diet, ensure they are getting the proper vitamins and nutrients, and buy quality feed at a less expensive price.

The eggs produced by home-raised chickens are of a higher quality and provide more nourishment. They also contain less harmful amounts of salmonella than commercial eggs.

### Free fertilizer

Chicken waste is high in nutrients and nitrogen, which is beneficial to your garden. It can help flowers, vegetables, and fruits grow faster, stronger, and larger. This fertilizer is also organic and free of pesticides, creating a healthier and safer garden.

### Educational

Raising chickens in the garden is a great way to educate your children about where food comes from and how to properly care for animals. Children can help to feed the chickens, gather eggs, and even socialize with the chickens.

Watching eggs hatch and the chicks grow can be fun and educational for children. It can teach children about the importance of life and how through proper care, a small, fragile chick can grow into a healthy and hearty chicken.

Caring for the chickens will also help to teach young children responsibility. While chickens do not require as much maintenance as a dog or cat, they still need fresh food and water on a daily basis.



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# Chicken care



Healthy chickens are bright and alert

## Caring for chickens is fairly easy once you have the chicken house and run in place.

As with any animal or pet there are certain things you need to consider to ensure a happy healthy chicken.

### Chicken housing

A chicken house or coop provides protection from predators and allows your chickens to have a safe place to lay their eggs. While chicken houses come in a variety of sizes, shapes, and designs, they should all have the following features:

- Built with materials that can be easily cleaned and disinfected.
- Provide proper ventilation.

- Have enough space (approx 12 metres square for 30 chickens).
- A light source to provide warmth and light during colder months.
- Adequate perches for the chickens to roost at night.

Your coop will need to include a lay box for your chickens. A lay box is simply a wooden box lined with straw; however, you can make it as extravagant as you like. Make sure the lay box provides a roof for the laying hens, and fits them comfortably on three sides.



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## Chicken care continued

It is important that your chickens have access to a fenced area outdoors. Chickens have a natural urge to scratch dirt, dust bathe, dig and eat bugs, and lay in the sun.

Having a properly fenced outdoor area protects your chickens from predators, but be sure to use fencing that is not spaced too far apart, as your chickens may get caught in the fence gaps.

If food or water is given to your chickens outside of the coop, be sure some sort of shelter covers it. The outdoor area should also have some trees or man-made shelters so that your chickens have some protection from the weather.

Be sure to maintain the outdoor areas your chickens have access to. For example, if the grass becomes too long it can be a choking hazard to your lovely pets.

### Nutrition

Chickens need a balance of fat, protein, and carbohydrates in addition to a range of vitamins and minerals. The best way to ensure you're providing the correct balance of nutrients is to buy commercially produced feed. Feed can be purchased at local feed stores, pet shops or at all good garden centres.

Most commercially produced foods do not contain added hormones or antibiotics unless specifically marked. Be sure the feed contains some animal protein, as animal protein is vital in a proper chicken diet. If allowed to roam outdoors freely, chickens will consume approximately 30% of their diet from grass. Clean the chicken feeders regularly to keep your chickens happy and healthy.

Foraging is a great way for your chickens to obtain extra nutrients. Consuming and foraging for grass, small bugs, weeds, seeds, and small rocks aid in digestion, provide your chickens with fresh foods and extra vitamins, gives your chicken additional exercise, and trims their nails through scratching and digging.

Always give your chickens fresh, clean water. You can use special chicken watering containers or simply dishes to provide your chickens with a constant supply of fresh water.

### Health

To ensure a healthy flock, always clean food and water dishes. Keep your coop clean and limit the number of chickens inside each coop. Never feed your chickens rotten or moldy food. And make time to observe your chickens for unusual or alarming behaviors.

Healthy chickens are bright and alert. Possible symptoms of illness or injury include weight loss, coughing, swollen joints, loss of feathers, labored breathing, enlarged abdomen, thin egg shells, diarrhea, not eating or drinking, abscesses or open wounds, and warts or scabs.

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## Chicken care continued

If one of your chickens becomes ill or injured, be sure to isolate it from the rest of your flock. Chickens can become infected with parasites such as lice, fleas, and mites. These parasites can easily be treated and removed from your chickens by seeing your veterinarian or purchasing products such as diatomaceous earth.

### Introducing New Chickens

Introducing a new chicken to your flock can present problems, but there are some ways to reduce fighting between new chickens and your existing flock.

Try to introduce new chickens that are of the same age and size as your flock. You may need to build a separate and temporary enclosure for your new chickens and introduce them slowly to the existing chickens.

Your chickens can become aggressive because they want to protect their area from the “intruding” new chicken. You may consider feeding your existing flock treats, such as fruits, worms, or fresh greens, to distract them from the new chicken.

It is best to introduce new chickens when it is dark; if the chickens all wake up together, they are less likely to notice a new addition.



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# Choosing your chicken house



*A chicken house will protect your chickens from predators*

**There are many factors you need to consider when buying a chicken house. Ask yourself how many chickens do I need to house? How much room do I have for a chicken house?**

You will also need to consider the function, location, and material of the chicken house. Other considerations include features such as nesting boxes or egg gathering trays.

## Size

First, determine how much space you want to devote to your chicken house. This will help narrow your search, as well as help determine the number of chickens you can raise.

Once you know your maximum size, you can look at how many chickens you want. For the health and safety of your chickens, do not exceed the recommended capacity of the chicken house.

## Function

Next you will want to decide what function you want the chicken house to serve. Your chicken house will have a different layout and features for different functions.

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## Choosing your chicken house continued

For example, do you want to breed and raise chickens? If so, you will want a nesting box where the mother hen can hatch the eggs and protect her young chickens.

If you plan to gather the eggs, however, you will need access to collect the eggs. Some mother hens can be protective of their eggs, so you need to make access quick and easy.

### Location

Important considerations include the location of the chicken house, such as whether it will be placed in the sun or shade. A sunny location might require better ventilation to keep the chickens from overheating, while a shady or windy location might require better insulation to keep the chickens warm.

### Material

When considering your materials, keep in mind that a wood house will provide more weather protection, while wire mesh will give better ventilation. Many chicken houses will offer a combination of the two, giving the chickens a wood box area to nest in warmth and privacy with a wire mesh portion for walking around in warmer weather.

### Maintenance and Cleaning

Regardless of the size, function, or material, all chicken houses will require maintenance and cleaning. The frequency of the cleaning will be determined by the number of chickens you house, while the type of cleaning will depend on the material.

If the chicken house has a dirt floor with

straw, you will need to periodically shovel or rake the soiled areas. If it has a cement floor, you can spray it with your garden hose to clean the floor.

Plan to inspect your chicken house on a routine basis, such as quarterly or annually. This will allow you to identify any problems before they get large. It will be easier to patch small cracks or holes as they appear, so it pays to provide routine inspection and maintenance.



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# Chicken runs



*Allow chickens plenty of space to roam.*

## **One way a person can offer both outdoor exercise and protection is by providing a chicken run.**

Those that raise their own chickens know that these animals need time outside in order to be healthy.

Chickens need a coop, but they should not spend the entire day inside. Letting them run around the yard allows them exercise but offers little protection.

Chicken runs have many benefits. They protect the chickens from predators, as well as allowing them access to fresh air, exercise, and natural light. Chickens need to peck and scratch, and a run gives them a safe place to do these things. There are a few things to consider when choosing and positioning a chicken run.

## **Size**

The size of the run will depend on how many chickens it will house. There should be about one square meter per chicken. This will allow each animal plenty of space to roam.

There are a few different kinds of chicken runs available. Some are built as an attachment to the chicken coop while others are separate. Those that are attached to the coop are usually recommended because this allows the chickens to have access to both at any given time.



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## Chicken runs continued

### Materials

Most of these items are built using a wooden frame with a wire mesh or chainlink. There are various designs available. Some have wooden tops to provide some shade, while others just have mesh to allow more light into the run.

Some are built to provide the owner easy access to the run by being tall enough for a person. Some also come equipped with a door built into the run.

### Location

When choosing a place for the chicken run, it is important to find a spot that will protect the animals from the elements. Level land will make it easier to position the run. These should not be placed in a dip in the lawn or somewhere where water is known to collect.

One must also be sure that the animals will have access to both shade and sunlight throughout the day. This will allow them to keep from becoming overheated while enjoying the sunlight.

### Cleaning

Chickens do eventually create a fouled, muddy mess out of the area they roam. There are a couple of options when maintaining the run. If the run is light enough that it may be lifted, it can be moved to a fresh part of the yard whenever it becomes necessary.

Another option is to line the run with gravel, bark chips, straw, or other suitable materials. Once these become fouled, the owner may clean them out and replace them. If the run receives plenty of sunlight throughout the day, it will take longer for it

to become soggy and muddy.

These animals are relatively easy to raise and care for and may provide the owner with fresh eggs. Healthier chickens are more productive. A chicken run is a great way to better their health and production.



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# Feeding Chickens



Chickens will pick up bugs, grass, seeds, and other natural foods.

## What you choose to feed your chickens is important.

The home chicken flock can provide not only the best and freshest eggs available, it can also put meat in the freezer, provide fertilizer for the garden, and even help control insects.

### Feeding Chicks

Many people start their home flock by either purchasing chicks from the local pet shop or by ordering them direct from the hatchery.

These tiny birds' specific nutritional requirements can be found in commercially prepared "chick starters." Sometimes called "mash," chick starter is a very finely ground preparation which has the necessary levels of vitamins, minerals,

and protein for chicks up to 8 weeks of age. This feed usually consists of around 20-22% protein and is available with added medications to prevent coccidiosis, an intestinal parasite especially deadly to young birds.

However, some poultry owners are hesitant to use feed containing antibiotics and prefer chick starter that is labeled as non-medicated.

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## Feeding chickens continued

### Feeding Adolescents

Depending on the purpose of the chicks (meat or eggs), they can be switched to a "grower ration" sometime between 4 and 6 weeks. This ration may come in a less finely ground form than starter and will come with the appropriate formulation of vitamins, minerals, and protein. The protein level is slightly lower than chick starter, usually around 18%.

Pullets (young female chickens) can be put on grower ration at around 6 weeks of age. They can then be switched to "developer" at around 14 weeks of age and can stay on that ration until they begin laying.

### Broiler and Finisher Ration

For chickens destined for the dinner table, switching to a "developer" ration at around 4 weeks should slow down their rate of growth. This will allow the bones to keep up with the overall growth of the bird and is especially important with "meat" breeds that have been developed for rapid growth. A 17% "finisher" at 9 weeks will see them through to the age of butcher (11 or 12 weeks).

### Feeding Layers

Once pullets start laying, they should be fed feed specified for layers with a protein level of around 16-17%. This feed will have the extra calcium a layer needs to ensure strong egg shells.

### Supplemental Feeds

Ideally, chickens should have access to a grassy area and plenty of sunlight. Under those conditions, the chickens will pick up bugs, grass, seeds, and other natural

foods.

Many people also feed their chickens a preparation known as "scratch." This is typically a mixture of two or more grains, usually cracked corn, wheat, oats, and possibly additional grains as well.

Chickens love these and they do provide some benefit nutritionally; however these feeds should provide only a small percentage of their daily feed consumption.



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