

I want CHICKENS (but know nothing about them)!!!

"WHERE DO YOU START?" I HEAR YOU ASK, "DO I START WITH A CHICKEN OR AN EGG?"

There is no doubt that there is plenty of information about getting started with chickens, whether it be on the web, magazines, books or advice from your neighbour. The best advice is keep it simple and start small.

One thing is for sure, you will constantly learn something new as you get going as a chook owner.

Keeping chooks is one of the best ways to deal with your household waste - afterall chickens are natural recyclers. There are many reasons to have chooks as pets mainly that they are "cheep" to keep and only a little supplemental food is required along with fresh water and somewhere to scratch around. They are great at helping in the garden by providing manure and their bedding can be recycled into your veggie beds as mulch. Their constant scratching around helps aerate the soil and make pest reduction a favourite past time. They also provide you with ethical eggs, you know what goes into them and they can be better for you than store bought eggs.

Where do you get chickens?

Check out your local options first - local farm supply stores, markets, Facebook Buy Swap & Sell sites, even your local paper may advertise hens for sale.

What type of chicken should I get?

No two chooks are the same! So which breed is right for you? Standard size or Bantam? There are over 400 different breeds of chooks so pick the one you like looking at, if nothing else you will get the pleasure of a nice looking chook who might also give you eggs. Remember, a well cared for chicken can live for many years, so it is important to get the right one to suit you.

How many should I keep?

Being a very social creature chickens should be kept in groups. Three being the minimum, five being optimum in case one or two die. One chook is a very lonely chook. Check with your local council about rules relating to keeping chooks.

How soon before I get eggs from my chickens?

If you want eggs immediately then buy 4-6 month old pullets instead of cute little chicks. Pullets (young hens) will start to lay when they're 4-6 months old depending on the breed.

How many eggs can I expect?

It is reasonable to expect one egg every day but none during the yearly moulting period. Remember the moulting period will depend entirely on the breed you have purchased, so it is important to understand this when purchasing your birds.



What do chickens eat?

Chickens will eat any good food scraps from salads, vegetable peelings, fruit, nuts, leftover mashed potatoes and so on. Being omnivores they also love to hunt bugs and mice. Supplemental chicken food or layer pellets should be provided as they contain additional minerals, trace elements, calcium and shell grit to assist feather formation, general health and egg formation. Remember, don't feed meat products to your chicken, they get enough from scratching around their coop.

How many square metres per chook?

Depends on the number of birds and what housing options you can supply in your yard. Best talk to an expert for an accurate figure.

Do chooks need any protection from weather?

Chickens can keep themselves warm but cope less well in the heat. A dry, ventilated coop is best as they do not like damp conditions. Chooks don't like drafts so make sure any ventilation is away from roosting locations in the coop.

How often does a coop need cleaning?

Regular cleaning reduces the possibility of smells emanating from the coop but it will depend on the size of the coop. Keep your animals in a manner that does not cause a nuisance to any person.

Are they noisy?

Who doesn't enjoy the sound of happy hens clucking but you shouldn't keep a rooster in a residential area as they can be a noisy nuisance.

Do chickens get sick?

Most problems occur when raising chicks; bumblefoot and pecking wounds are common if the incorrect enclosure is used. Good tactile flooring is essential as well as daily cleaning to ensure water supply is not fouled and feed is dry.

Do they need a separate water bowl to wash?

Poultry bathe with dust baths rather than water so a dry patch in the garden/pen needs to be provided. You can add some diatomaceous earth to assist but generally dust is enough to get rid of any mites etc.

How can I best protect against predators?

Making the walls high enough is not protection enough. You must have a floor wired against anything wanting to dig, foxes, dogs and even cats. If you have a pen, wire from the enclosure wall out about 30 cm along the ground to deter diggers.

If I want more information, where can I go?

Check out your local poultry clubs - a Google search, your local papers, or even the breeder you purchased your birds from may have the contacts for you.

