

THE BASICS OF KEEPING CHICKENS.



More and more people are becoming interested in keeping poultry. People now realize that you can keep two or three chickens in your average garden. What they must consider is the care and welfare of your poultry. They are the 'Five Freedoms' for laying hens to consider first! They are as follows:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst with ready access to water and a diet to maintain health.
2. Freedom from discomfort. By providing an appropriate environment with shelter and a comfortable resting place.
3. Freedom from pain injury or disease by either prevention and the rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to express natural behaviour by providing space, sufficient facilities and the company of the animal's own kind.
5. Freedom from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering.



That might all look a bit daunting, but I have learned over the years that it is easier to do it right first time, and that prevention is much better than cure.



Preparing for your chickens!

What to consider: When deciding on type of poultry and housing you need to be clear about what you want. Are you interested in keeping chickens for self-sufficiency or whether you want to keep them purely for the pleasure of doing so? You also need to ascertain how much time and space you have at your disposal. If you have little of either you may consider a pen with some bantams (small version of the larger chicken) available in lots of colours.



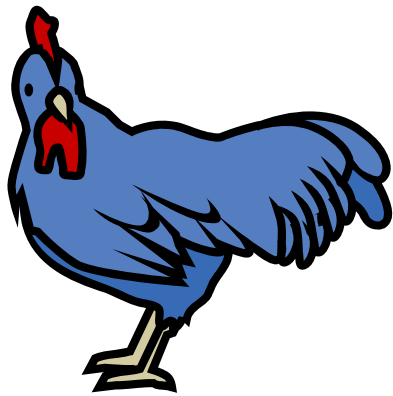
Silkies are the most popular.

This is a picture of a

Partridge silkie hen. You have to make your mind up as to whether you want pure breeds or hybrids. There is a bird out there for every need!

Housing.

There are many types of houses on the market now, you can decide on the size when you know how many hens you want to keep. They will need a separate nesting area, a roosting area, and access to outside grazing also it will need to be Fox proof! Hens do not like draughts they will cope with the cold quicker than a damp and draughty house. Adequate ventilation is also very important. These are the things to consider when choosing a house for your poultry.



Bedding: _____

The next item is what type of bedding to use. **Wood shavings** are the most common type, what you must avoid is fine sawdust, as this can be ingested and cause real problems. **Hay** can be used but has little drainage properties, it is better used in the nest boxes where it is easy to arrange into a round nest. **Straw** is a better medium for drainage, and the hens like scratching about in it; it can also be used for nest boxes. It is worth mentioning that many poultry keepers do not use either as it can bring in and harbour mites and for that reason is not used. **Newspapers**. These are easy to change and do not harbour any parasites but can be hard to keep in place. Whatever bedding you use, make sure that it is not mouldy or damp. Mould causes respiratory diseases, and wet bedding can be a breeding ground for bacteria.

Feeders and Drinkers:

Fresh water is essential for the health of your poultry. You can use any bowl or container, but you will find that the poultry will contaminate it so for that reason bell drinkers are used. They can be plastic or galvanized. Feeders to choose are bell type (shaped like a bell) or many other types on the market.

The key is that they cannot get in to soil their food. Food should be kept in an air tight container and not allowed to get damp. It needs to be covered and kept somewhere it will not encourage either fox's or rodents to help themselves.

Dust Baths.

Poultry love to have a dust bath, so they should have access to soil /sand etc, this keeps their feathers in good condition and they just love it. A trick if you have a dust bath they use regularly is to put some anti-mite power in it and the hens will then do the work for you!

Food.

Domestic hens are usually fed a commercial pellet. This has all the requirements minerals, etc. It can come in pellets – crumb- or mash. All dependent on the age of your poultry. A ration of mixed corn is very much enjoyed and the birds should be left to feed as they need. They love scrapping around and will readily eat insects, grubs, seeds etc. White bread is bad for birds so use brown and moisten it. Grass is essential for your birds, and will reward you with lovely yellow yolks. Grit is also essential in allowing birds to digest food once they have eaten it. It is available in most stores. Make sure fresh water is available at all times. You will get out of chickens what you put in. If you feed them well and regularly there is no reason why



they will not reward you with fresh eggs.