



Chicken Fact Sheet

We are committed to finding safe, loving homes for our rescued animals and want to make sure that you are making an informed decision when choosing to adopt. Please read this Fact Sheet carefully before filling out the application, as well as do your own research.

Characteristics:

- Chickens can live 10-15 years and have been known to live as long as 25 years.
- They are territorial and do not wander far from their home, preferring to roost in a familiar place.
- They can be kept with other livestock except for ducks/geese, as chickens need to stay dry to be healthy.
- Some roosters may get along together as bachelors, but they often will fight over hens; the ideal ratio is 1 rooster per 8-10 hens.
- Chickens molt once per year, usually in the fall; the process takes 2-3 months
- Before adopting a chicken:
 - Check your local zoning regulations to make sure that you can have them.
 - Make sure that you have the time to care for them and that you have responsible caretakers to cover for you in the event of illness or when on vacation.
 - Make sure that your vet cares for this species or find one who does prior to adoption.

Shelter & Fencing:

- An ideal spot for a chicken coop is on a hill/slope for drainage.
- Chickens can be kept in a small stationary coop with a fenced yard; housing should be insulated and heated; needs a latching door to keep out predators. The yard should be spacious and a mix of sun and shade.
- Ideal housing is high enough for caregiver to enter and clean.
- Will need a wooden perch for roosting: broom handles, dowels, or sticks approximately 1"-1.5" in diameter all work fine.
- One nesting box (can use covered litter box) per 4 hens with 3-4" of litter.
- 4" of litter on floor of coop
- Fencing should be at least 4 feet high; wire mesh is best. If you live in an area with predators, use 6-8 foot fencing and consider making a "ceiling" of wire mesh. Burying wire fencing a few inches into the ground will discourage predators who might otherwise dig underneath the wire.

Feeding:

- Should feed and water twice per day. Empty the water dish and clean it out at both times.
- Pelleted food is best; buy only as much as your chickens will eat in 2-3 weeks, as the food will go stale; free choice food is best for **layer** breeds.

- Cracked corn can be given as a treat, especially in winter, as it can help keep them warm overnight; black oil sunflower seeds can also be mixed into their feed for extra calcium.
- Chickens love tomatoes, lettuce, apple parings, bits of toast, plants, seeds, and insects.
- DO NOT FEED onion, garlic, or raw potato peelings (they cannot digest).
- Older hens that don't forage need extra calcium (black oil sunflower seeds are rich in calcium).
- It should be noted that **broiler** breeds cannot be given free choice food and require restricted low fat feed, as they are prone to obesity, gout, arthritis, and heart attacks. Because of this, broilers have a much shorter lifespan of 1-3 years.
- **Eggs should be collected daily.** Even if you aren't going to use the eggs, they need to be collected, as they will attract predators. They will also rot, making for odorous and unhealthy conditions.

Health Care:

- Signs of a healthy chicken: smooth/shiny feathers, bright eyes, smooth/clean legs, full/bright combs, soundless breathing.
- Keep your chickens warm and dry and make sure to provide clean water to prevent diseases; also avoid puddles in the yard.
- Regularly check for external parasites, such as lice and mites, under wings, around head, and around the vent under the tail (easiest to see at night with a flashlight). Lice look like clear/yellow dots and mites look black/red. To treat lice/mites, dust your chickens or discuss treatment with your vet.
- Consult your veterinarian if you note diarrhea, listlessness, pale coloring, loss of appetite and coughing.
- A fecal test should be done every three months to test for internal parasites. Worming medication can be purchased at farm supply stores. Speak to your veterinarian on what medication you should use.
- If you notice bloody diarrhea and listlessness, consult your vet immediately. These are signs of coccidiosis, a parasitic infection. Keeping the bedding clean and dry will help to prevent this disease.
- If you notice swelling on the ball of the foot, it is likely a condition called bumblefoot. Mild cases can be treated with wraps. Others may need antibiotics. Bumblefoot can become a chronic condition. Consult with your veterinarian.
- Be mindful of possible crop impaction. This is when food becomes lodged in the crop, preventing passage through the digestive tract. If not detected, the bird will die from malnutrition. Feel the crop of any bird who stops eating or seems sick. Surgery is needed to remove the impaction.
- In summer: look for signs of heat stress – breathing through mouth, spreading wings away from body; give continuous access to cool water and access to shade. If you notice excessive panting, open mouth breathing, drooping head, and collapse, your bird is suffering from heat exhaustion. Move the bird indoors immediately, mist lightly with cool water and turn on a fan. Call your veterinarian.
- In winter: check coop for drafts; insulate coop, provide extra hay, or use small electric heater; **combs and wattles can be prone to frostbite.**
- The best way to pick up your chicken is to herd it into a small area. Place one hand gently on the chicken's back and one hand in front to keep it from moving. Move both hands over the wings and lift the bird. If you lose a wing, put the bird down and start again.