



**Welcome to  
Backyard Chickens!**



## Started in 2009

- **Located in Alvarado**
- **Organizer of The Cowtown Backyard Poultry Group**
- **Vendor for Elizabeth Anna's Old World Garden, Chalk Botanical Gardens, Somervall County Master Gardener's Association**

# Why Keep Chickens?



**70 years ago Backyard Chickens were the norm – in the country and in cities large and small! Now there is a resurgence in the popularity of backyard chickens. Chickens are becoming the pet du jour!**

- **Number one benefit, of course, is for fresh eggs. With the recent outbreak of Salmonella, it's wonderful to know where your eggs come from. As a former city girl, I can tell you that there is nothing like going out and gathering eggs from your chickens. It takes you back to a much simpler time.**
- **Chicken is healthier than red meat**
- **Chickens keep your insect population under control**
- **They also provide a rich manure to supplement your potting soil**
- **It's hard to beat all of these benefits for a little water and feed!**



# What You Need to Know About Raising Chickens

- **What are your city ordinances and zoning laws? Some cities or municipalities allow chickens and some don't. Some allow chickens but have a limit on the number of chickens you can have. Same thing with roosters.**
- **Decide what chickens are best for you. Not all chickens are created equal. Before you decide what type to buy, you need to determine what purpose they will serve.**
  - **For Eggs?**
  - **For Companionship?**
  - **For Meat?**
  - **For both meat and eggs?**
- **Will they spend most of their time inside or out? Will they be sequestered in a chicken house or do you favor free-range hens? Certain breeds don't like confinement, while others would starve if they had to forage and find their own food.**



# What You Need to Know About Raising Chickens

- Will they have to contend with sweltering heat or frigid winter nights?
- If you live in the city, what kind of neighbors do you have? How will they accept chickens in their neighborhood? Some chickens are quiet and calm. Others are noisy and flighty. It depends on the breed.



# The Emotional Side of Raising Poultry by K.J. Theodore



- **Raising chickens is not for the faint of heart!**
- **They are becoming more thought of and marketed as “pets” as opposed to “livestock”. There is danger in that thought process.**

# Pet Chickens



# The Emotional Side of Raising Poultry by K.J. Theodore



- **Chickens suffer from more diseases than almost any other species on earth!**



# The Emotional Side of Raising Poultry by K.J. Theodore



- They drop dead – sometimes for no apparent reason – and sometimes for reasons that you have no control over, or for which there is no cure.
- As chickens becomes more and more like pets to people, they are going to become more and more hurt by their losses.

# Breeds and Uses



- **Breed Chart**
- **Egg Chickens – mature quickly. Everything they eat goes into egg production. Examples include: White Leghorns, Production Reds, Minorca, Ancona, Buttercup, Andalusian and Spanish White Face.**

# Breeds and Uses



- **Meat Chickens – Usually White Cornish and White Plymouth Rock Hybrids have broad, meaty breasts, white feathers and they mature at lightening speed. Broilers (fryers) are ready for the freezer in about 7 weeks and Roasters in 10 weeks.**
- **Dual Purpose Chickens – lay fewer eggs than super layers and mature slower than meat hybrids, but they're ideal all around hobby birds. They are quieter, gentler, friendlier and more self reliant than the specialist birds. Nearly all lay handsome, brown eggs and are meaty enough to eat should you wish to do so. For this very reason, at Skinner Select, we specialize in only dual purpose, heritage chickens (Rhode Island Reds, Dominiques, Barred Rocks and Buckeyes).**

# Chickens Scratch



- **A chicken has no teeth. When they eat, the food moves down the esophagus into the crop, a kind of storage area. The crop allows the chicken to store a considerable amount of food at one time.**
- **Chickens see in color; Their visual acuity is about the same as a human.**

# Chickens Scratch

- Chickens do not have external ears, but they do have external auditory meatuses and hear quite well. They have poorly developed smell.
- Skin pigmentation varies by breed and can be yellow, white or black.
- Chicks are born with soft, fluffy down. This down is replaced by feathers in 3 to 6 weeks.



# Chickens Scratch

- **Pullets are young hens under one year of age; Cockerels are young roosters under one year of age. It is difficult to sex a chicken under 12 weeks of age.**



- **Chickens can live 10 years or longer if well cared for and not taken by a predator.**

# Chicken Scratch

- **Once hens start laying, their optimum laying time is 2 to 2.5 years. After that, egg production will start to diminish.**
- **Pullets (young hens) begin laying eggs anywhere between 18 and 24 weeks of age. A hen does not have to be with a rooster to produce eggs. A rooster is only needed when you want your eggs fertilized for hatching baby chicks.**

# Chicken Scratch

- **Once a hen starts to lay, she will lay roughly one egg a day. She lays her eggs on a cycle of roughly one hour later each day and she does not like to lay an egg at night. Eventually, she will skip a day and start the process over again.**



- **Generally speaking, the color of eggs a hen will lay are dependent on her breed. Some hens lay white, others brown, while still others will lay pastel colored or olive colored eggs.**



# How To Get Started

## Places To Get Chickens

- For full grown chickens, you can go on craigslist or other websites to find chickens. I cannot caution you enough on checking references on sellers. Many sellers, whether on craigslist or other sites, are not reputable. They buy chickens at auctions that are old, diseased, etc. and sell them to unknowing buyers. Before we decided to go into the chicken business, we were the victims of unscrupulous sellers. Chickens can mask symptoms of diseases for days or weeks. One chicken with a respiratory condition or something worse can wipe out your entire flock. You may also be sold chickens that are too old to lay.
- If you buy from a seller, try to at least make sure they are state inspected and NPIP certified.
- Look for nasal and eye discharges. Smell the area around their beak. If it has a bad smell, the chicken is sick and you should not buy it.
- If in doubt, **DO NOT BUY THE CHICKEN.**

# How To Get Started

- You can order day old chicks from a hatchery like Ideal in Cameron, TX, MacMurray Hatchery, etc. The chicks will be shipped to the Post Office and you can pick them up there.
- You can purchase chickens from a local hatchery. Our hatchery is located in Alvarado (25 miles south of Fort Worth). We specialize in heritage and endangered breeds.
- You can incubate your own eggs and breed your own chickens.
- Regardless whether you buy older hens, pullets or chicks, you should have your set up ready to go BEFORE purchasing chickens.

# The First 60 Days

- **Brooder.** You will need some type of brooder box for your chicks. It can be as simple as a sturdy cardboard box, plastic tub or a small animal cage like you would use for rabbits.
- **Flooring.** The flooring for chicks under 2 weeks of age should be paper towels. This is because when chicks are young they do not know what feed is and they will peck at anything. They cannot digest shavings and will become impacted and could die. After 2 weeks, you can use Pine (not cedar) shavings. Regardless of what you've heard or read, do not use smooth or shredded newspaper for baby chicks. This will cause splayed legs, etc. You can get Pine Shavings at a Feed Store.

# The First 60 Days

- **Temperature.** Get a small thermometer and put in the floor of the brooder. The temperature in your brooder box needs to be between 90 and 100 degrees the first week. Then decrease by 5 degrees every week. Get a brood lamp at the feed store or home improvement store. Put a 100 watt bulb in it and point it in one corner (not the whole brooder). During the summer, you may start out with a 60 watt bulb. If your chicks are too cold, they will huddle together. If they get too warm, they will go away from the light to get away from the heat.
- **Feed.** We start our chickens on Game Bird Feed until they are 6 weeks old and then switch to Game Bird Grower. A feed store or Tractor Supply has all types of plastic feeders.
- **Water.** Get a waterer at the feed store or Tractor Supply. Put rocks in the tray so when they are learning to drink, they don't fall in and drown.

# The First 60 Days

- **Vitamins – Get a pouch of electrolytes and vitamins from the feed store and mix with water the first 3 days when you move your chicks. Chickens are creatures of habit and do not handle change or moves well. This will help them handle the stress.**
- **Play Time. Play with your chicks by picking them up and petting them. This will get them used to being around people.**
- **Outside Time. After your chicks are around 5 to 6 weeks old, section off an area in your yard where chicks can explore, scratch, etc. Make sure you can catch them when it's time to come in.**
- **Coop. In the summer, 4 to 5 week old chicks can be moved to a coop or pen, but it needs to be predator proof. All windows and openings to the coop should be covered with hardware cloth (not chicken wire). Predators (snakes and raccoons) can get through or tear up regular chicken wire. Your coop should have a door on it that can be closed at night.**

# Nutrition and Health

- **When your chickens get to be laying age, they need to be fed good chicken feed. We feed ours Layer pellets and supplement them with calf manna and sunflower seeds. Your layer pellets or feed needs to be at least 18% protein to optimize egg production and good health.**
- **Chicken scratch is a good treat for your chickens during the fall and winter months, but should not be their whole source of nutrition. Chickens that are fed solely chicken scratch, develop malnutrition. Chicken scratch contains several different grains including cracked corn, milo and wheat. Chickens cannot digest corn and it increases their metabolism. This is a recipe for disaster during our summer months.**

# Nutrition and Health

- **Treats for your chickens are leftover vegetables, bread and bugs.**
- **Chickens Need to be wormed on a regular basis beginning at 6 weeks of age. Unless you have a worm infestation, start out with a natural wormer like Unfiltered Apple Cider Vinegar. If you have older chickens and you have never wormed them, you may have to start with a commercial wormer like Wazine.**
- **Vitamins are important to your chickens health and should be given twice monthly for 2 days (total 4 days a month).**



# Coop Design

- **Coops can be as elaborate or as basic as you want**
- **Basic Design:**
  - **Easy to enter so it can be cleaned.**
  - **Should be well ventilated, free of drafts and provide shelter from rain, wind and extreme heat or cold.**
  - **Ideally located close to water and electricity so that feeding and watering is a relatively simple task**





# Coop Design

- There should be roosts to encourage sleeping within the coop and nesting boxes to entice hens to lay their eggs in the boxes rather than on the floor or other places
- **Large enough to house your birds comfortably.**
- Should be located in an area where there is good drainage, adequate light and good airflow for ventilation.

# Coop Design

- The coop should have cross ventilation for good health as it removes ammonia and excess moisture from the air
- **All openings to the coop should be covered with hardware cloth – NOT chicken wire. A racoon can easily remove chicken wire and decimate your entire flock.**

# Coop Design

- **The interior layout of your coop should provide roosting, feeding and egg laying areas. Enough space for your flock to exercise and dust bathe when it spends time inside the coop will prevent overcrowding that can lead to cannibalism.**
- **Roosts should be located away from entries/exits, nest boxes and feed/watering stations.**
- **General rule of thumb is 3 square feet per bird but this will depend on how much your birds will spend in the coop, free ranging, breed, etc.**
- **Doors should be closed at night**
- **Windows are imperative for light and ventilation**
- **Flooring depends on your budget – cement is a good option for most birds; wire flooring is good; wood is okay but susceptible to rot and chewing by rodents; dirt floors can harbor disease if not kept up.**

# Coups de Jour



# Coupe de Ville



# Coup Sophistique



# Information Sources

- [www.backyardchickens.com](http://www.backyardchickens.com)
- [www.featherfanciers.com](http://www.featherfanciers.com)
- [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) - The Cowtown Backyard Poultry Group
- [The Joy of Keeping Chickens by Jennifer Megysi](#)

# The End



***Thanks for Coming!!***