



## Why did the chicken...

Why did the chicken cross the road? To make its new home in your backyard! Yes, backyard chickens are quickly becoming a phenomenon across the country. Why? Here's just a few reasons from people who raise backyard birds:

- ◆ Easy and inexpensive to maintain
- ◆ Fresh, great tasting and nutritious eggs
- ◆ Chemical and bug-free pest control
- ◆ Manufacturers of the worlds best fertilizer
- ◆ Fun & friendly pets with personality!



## Getting Started

First, check your local laws and ordinances to see if you can legally keep chickens in your area. If you are good to go, you'll need to decide what age of chickens you want to care for. Caring for baby chicks is very different than caring for feathered out chicks or young chickens. If you're going to hatch them from eggs, your list of needs is going to grow.

If you want to start with baby chicks, your local feed store will probably have them in early spring. There are also online forums and websites where you can purchase chicks. To raise them as family friendly, it's best to start with baby chicks so they'll grow used to being around you.

## Chicks—the first 60 days

House baby chicks in a brooder which can be as simple as a cardboard box or a small animal cage like you'd use for rabbits. Adequate temperature is the most important factor in raising baby chicks. A 100 watt light bulb in one corner of the brooder will keep them warm. Start the temperature at 90 to 100 degrees and decrease it 5 degrees each week.



Cover the floor in pine shavings and keep feed and water in front of them. Chick crumbles/starter and a chick waterer are needed. Open containers of water pose a drowning hazard for baby chicks.

Be very careful when handling young chicks, but do play with them to get them used to being around people. Give them outside time, too, by sectioning off an area for them to explore and scratch. Make sure they are covered to protect them from predators.

# Time to move into the coop!



When your chicks are feathered out and over 60 days old, it's time to move them into a coop. A coop usually consist of a henhouse which is covered and an outside run. Coops can be built in all shapes and sizes from very elaborate to simple in design. What really matters is that your chickens have adequate space. The rule of thumb is:

- 2-3 square feet inside the henhouse per chicken
- 4-5 square feet in the outside run per chicken

There are many designs and free plans available on the internet. My favorite resource is [www.backyardbirds.com](http://www.backyardbirds.com) Keep predators in mind when designing your coop, and keep your chickens safe.

Pine shavings make the best flooring for your chicken coop.

For feed, use a basic layer feed purchased at your local feed supply store. Treats can include vegetables, bread, bugs and chicken scratch.

Commercially made chicken waterers provide a consistent, clean water supply and can be purchased online or at a local feed supply store.

## Incubators

So, you think you want to hatch out chicks? After you've purchased one, you must regulate its temperature and humidity before putting eggs in.

Temperature should be a steady 100 degrees. Humidity is also an important factor in hatching eggs. Humidity should be 50% for days 1-18 and 70-80% for the remaining days. Follow the instructions closely that come with your incubator.

There are many models to choose from, but one important factor to consider is whether you buy a self-turning model or turn them yourself. Budget and time are your main considerations as well as the number of eggs the incubator will hold.

Turning the eggs is of great importance and should be done everything if you don't choose a self-turning model.

How many days until hatching? 21 give or take a day.

After your chicks hatch, they can remain in the incubator for 48 hours. After that, move them to a brooder and be sure to supply them with plenty of food and water. Remember that chicks are susceptible to drowning. A shallow water cup with marbles in it can prevent drowning.

