

Backyard Chickens

Jefferson County allows the keeping of chickens in most single family detached and duplex zone districts under certain conditions. A miscellaneous permit needs to be obtained from the County's Planning and Zoning division prior to keeping any chickens on the property. This guide discusses additional items that should be considered when deciding to keep chickens.

Benefits

There are many benefits to raising backyard chickens. Chickens not only provide fresh, organic eggs everyday but also rich manure for gardening, hours of entertainment, and education for children on how to properly care for animals and where their food comes from.



Considerations

Noise

Hens are generally quiet but may make a lot of noise after they have laid an egg. Their "egg song" will typically last only a few minutes but can be quite disturbing. Hens always lay during the daylight and not at night while most people are sleeping, but this is something to consider.

Initial set-up

The initial setup of the coop and run can be costly but is also takes a lot of time and planning. Before buying the chickens and construction materials make sure to plan for the costs of all the materials required and the

amount of time it takes to build a secure coop and raise the chickens.

Long term plan

Chickens lay the most eggs the first two years of their lives. Consider what to do with the birds after they are less productive, especially since slaughtering is not allowed on-site by County regulations.

Neighbors

Neighbors may not be as enthusiastic about chickens as the person raising them. Consider the impact the hens will have on surrounding neighbors during the initial planning process. Talking to neighbors about the desire to have hens is always advised. Additionally, check with the area Homeowners' Association for any restrictive covenants that may prevent keeping chickens on private property.

Be a positive example of backyard chicken keeping and mitigate any negative impact the hens may have on neighbors.

Constructing your coop and run

Protect the hens from the elements, predators, injury, and theft through a safe and secure coop.

Coop Placement

Coops should be draft-free with windows/doors that can be opened to allow for ventilation. Coops should be placed on a high, well drained area to prevent prolonged dampness. The front of the coop should also be southern facing to allow for maximum sun exposure. It is highly recommended that shade be provided in the summer; chickens are very sensitive to hot temperatures. Also consider providing heat in the winter.

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Predator Resistant

Coops should be surrounded by an enclosed run. It is recommended that the mesh wiring be no less than 1 by 2 inch. To prevent digging predators the wire mesh should be buried 2 foot deep with a 2 foot apron surrounding it. To prevent flying predators the run should include an overhead enclosure as well. The hens should be locked in their coop every evening and be let out into the run every morning. Keeping the coop clean will also eliminate odors that draw predators.

Sanitation

Manure Management

The coop and run should be cleaned once a week to prevent odors. Any feed the birds scatter around the coop and run should be cleaned daily to prevent vermin. If the feeder is hung from the ceiling at the birds shoulder height it will be almost impossible for them to scratch and scatter food.

Food Storage

Food should be stored in a secure container off of the floor to prevent vermin from being attracted to the coop and taking up residence. Metal containers tend to sweat, promoting the growth of mildew. A plastic container is advised.

Salmonella

It is common for chickens to carry Salmonella. Salmonella is a type of germ that naturally lives in the intestines of poultry. To prevent a Salmonella infection hands should always be washed with soap and water immediately after touching live poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam. Any eggs laid by the hens should also be washed thoroughly before eating. Adults should supervise young children

when handling or touching the hens. Do not eat or drink in the area where the hens live or roam.

Chickens as your neighbor

When hearing a neighbor is going to keep chickens, there may be some anxiousness felt about whether there will be an increase in odors, noise, predators, and pests. Chickens are birds of prey so they are naturally very quiet birds. During the night the flock should be silent. If a coop is properly maintained there should not be any additional odors or increase in pests. A clean and secure coop will also help to ward off predators.

If odors or pests are noticed, consider talking to the neighbor keeping the chickens. Most likely they would like to see everyone enjoy their chickens just as much as they do. It may be surprising at how eager they are to resolve any issues that come up. If issues persist, contact Jefferson County Planning & Zoning at 303-271-8700 to register a complaint.

Definitions

Chicken: a domestic fowl, *Gallus domesticus*, descended from various jungle fowl of southeastern Asia and developed in a number of breeds for its flesh, eggs, and feathers

Resources

Classes through Denver Urban Homesteading
www.denverurbanhomesteading.com
CSU Extension Sustainable Small Acreage News
www.ext.colostate.edu/sam
Center for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/Features/SalmonellaPoultry/
Colorado Poultry Association
www.freeweb.com/coloradopoultryassociation
National Poultry Improvement Plan (NFIP)
www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_dis_spec/poultry/