



Chicken Care Sheet

When you bring your new chicks into their coop, acclimatize them to their new home. Keep them in the coop for at least 3 weeks, so if you do choose to free range them or they find a way out they will know where their home is at the end of the day.

Daily Care

- Open the door and let the chickens out of the coop into their run or free range
- Feed the birds
- Check on the water (refill if low/empty)
 - Hens sometimes poop in their water bowl or scratch dirt into it
- Collect eggs to encourage further laying
- Optional: throw bedding on poop, Dry poop = less flies
- Call your birds back into their coop and close the door at the end of the day, before dark

Weekly Care

- Replace coop bedding
- Quick clean of run
- Sanitize water container

Monthly Care

- Deep clean coop
 - A paint scraper is helpful to remove poop
- Sprinkle diatomaceous earth in dust bath area of your coop or run, wear mask
- Optional in summer: put up fly trap

The Chicken Coop

- Coop size - Make sure the coop is large enough for the amount of birds you are raising
- Predator proof run - recommended
 - Fully predator proof means that the chicken wire extends underground, wire needs to be galvanized, otherwise it will rust and break quickly
 - Area needs to be covered to prevent hawks
 - Automatic door is an option but added cost
- Needs proper drainage - Chickens cannot live in standing water
- Temperature control - needs to be cool and shaded in the summer, and warm and protected from wind and rain in the winter
- Must provide shade - trees or a shade cloth - chickens are susceptible to overheating in the summer

- Nesting box - One box is good for 1-3 hens
- Bedding - can be straw, sawdust, wood shavings, shredded paper
- Roosting Bar - A place for the chicken to rest
 - Cannot be metal
 - Best width is 4 inches, but 2 inches can suffice
- Great to place coop by a compost pile or hose for ease of cleaning
- Chickens enjoy dust baths and should have access to dry dirt, either on the coop floor or in a small sandbox outside

Feeding Your Chickens

- Provide clean water at all times!
- Up to 18 weeks - feed your chicks/pullets a chicken grower feed
- At 18 weeks switch to layer feed - organic, corn and soy free are available
 - Comes in pellet and crumble - your preference
- For 3 hens feed them approximately 0.75 lbs of food a day OR as much as they can eat in 15 minutes, if providing them with kitchen scraps or weeds - you can give them less feed
- Kitchen scraps
 - Give during the day, not right before they go to bed (uneaten scraps can attract other animals)
 - **Things to Give:** uncooked leafy greens (lettuce, collards, kale, etc.); most fruits (watermelon rinds or the whole fruit is hydrating during hot months); most vegetables like squash, broccoli, carrots; scratch or cooked grains like plain rice or oatmeal
 - **Things to avoid:** moldy or rotten food, coffee grounds, raw potatoes, potato skins, tomato leaves, onions, rhubarb, citrus, chocolate, raw (fresh or dried) beans, milkweed (butterfly weed), stone fruit pits, apple seeds, salt, bones, fat, foxgloves flowers, ivy, rhubarb, tulips, hydrangea (these can be poisonous to the chickens)
 - **Tip:** Try different kitchen scraps and herbs gradually so you may discover together what your chickens like to eat
- Supplements to help with egg laying and overall health
 - When the chickens start laying eggs, provide them with calcium in the form of oyster shell or crushed eggshells
 - Tip : bake the eggshells first to burn off any protein residue that might attract pests
 - Herbs that support chicken health: oregano, comfrey, parsley, lavender, dill, mint, and many more
 - You can scatter these in their coop, add dried leaves to their feed, or grow them near the coop so they may peck at them on their own

Eggs

- Fresh eggs have a natural “bloom” of helpful bacteria that keep the egg fresh without refrigeration. Once you wash the egg this bloom is removed and the eggs must be refrigerated
- Free-ranging chickens may hide their eggs

- Egg laying behavior
 - More eggs in the spring, hens respond to daylight
 - Fewer eggs in winter, you have the option to put a light in your coop
 - Hens' egg production starts around a year and declines after two years, eventually they stop laying

To Free Range or Not

- A great time to free range is when you've just finished turning over crops/weeding before you are planting a new area of your garden
- Pros
 - They turn the soil while adding manure and removing seeds and bugs
 - They have fun running around
- Cons
 - Chicken may poop on your patio or near your doors
 - Chickens will probably eat your baby plants and scratch around your more established plants
 - Chicken poop is "hot" - meaning the raw poop can scorch your plants - it is best aged before applying to the garden
 - Hens may escape or be attacked

Predators

- Some predators may attempt to get into your coop - especially if there are holes near the perimeter of your coop (your chickens may scratch near the sides of the coop)
- If your chickens free range it's best to be close, otherwise they may be susceptible to an attack
- Different types of predators:
 - Dogs - best to keep dogs away from chickens, even gentle dogs can be too rough for these birds or their animal instincts kick in and they attack
 - Racoons, possums, hawks, foxes - can get into holes in your coop
 - Cats - if they are big cats, but usually a full grown hen can protect themselves

General Information

- Normal Behaviors
 - Hen is broody - meaning they sit on their eggs, trying to incubate them
 - Dust Bathing - this is how chickens clean themselves
 - Picking on one hen (they develop a pecking order)
 - Molting - losing feathers once a year
 - Hen acting like a rooster
 - Hens escaping coop
 - They will head back to their coop around dusk, keep the door open around that time and close when it's dark and everyone is home
 - All hens fighting for one nesting box
 - Flying
 - Can trim flight feathers, flight feathers can bleed so have cauterizing powder at hand

- Adding More Hens
 - Don't put them together immediately, have a 1-2 week quarantine period to check health of the new birds
 - You can also give older birds dewormer
 - Check for mites
- Pests
 - Flies - clean chicken poop regularly, don't leave food scraps to rot
 - Mites - make available diatomaceous earth - if really bad, give the birds a diatomaceous earth bath
 - Worms
 - Rats
 - Ideally feed scraps earlier in the day so the hens have time to eat
 - Keep chicken food in metal trash cans
 - Free feeding will attract more rats - try feeding chickens once a day and don't leave extra food out overnight
- Sick
 - Need a place for them to go separate from other chickens
 - Visible worms in their poo
 - Sneezing or gasping for air with a stretched neck
- Dispatching (End of Life)
 - Laying hens are older so their meat is tough, not tender for eating but OK for broth, you can eat it if you dispatch it properly or bury in yard and plant something over it
 - Quick dispatch method is to cut the main artery in the neck using a killing cone, other option is to take to a place like a Halal meat butcher - call first

Safety and Sanitation

- Wash hands after holding them, chickens can harbor salmonella
- Don't kiss your chickens
- Wear "outdoor" shoes in coop
- Do not bring poultry inside the house
- Proper composting of poultry manure prior to use as a fertilizer
 - **90 days of curing** for fruiting plants like tomatoes, fruit trees, berry bushes
 - **120 days of curing** for plants that touch the dirt like lettuce, greens, root vegetables
- Seeking veterinary help in case of illness in the birds and reporting clusters of bird deaths
- Prompt disposal of dead birds and not slaughtering poultry in the home.

This Chicken Care Sheet was produced from internet research, interviews with Chicken Care Stewards in Solano County and from the Instructor Notes written by Violette Kyse from the 2023 In person Chicken Steward Class. It was compiled by Lauren Gucik - Solano Gardens Program Manager at Sustainable Solano.