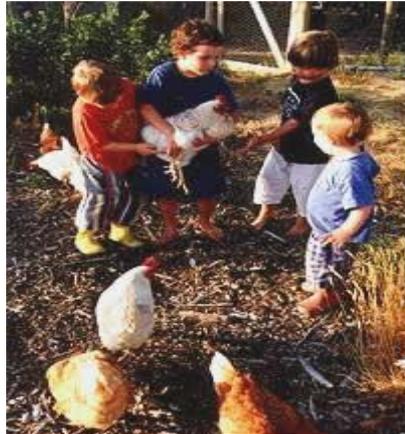


Poultry Health

Normally hens start to lay when 5-6 months old and then lay for 12-14 months, moult and rest for 2 months and then lay for a second period of about 10 months. The hens are usually sold at the end of the second period of lay when they are nearly 3 years old.

Moulting is a natural process in which a hen loses its old feathers and replaces them with new ones. While moulting hens will stop laying for up to 3 months and they will normally moult or nest once a year. Moulting can however occur at any time of year if a hen encounters severe stress. A rapid loss of feathers in the flock is usually a sign that something serious has happened such as chilling, or lack of water for more than 12 hours.

Moulting as a reaction to stress causes hens to stop laying or to lay at a reduced rate. Other stresses include moving, handling, overheating, beak trimming, lack of water and fright.



Local Suppliers

Check Local Newspapers

Dairy Farmers Country Stores, 19 Allowrie St, Jamberoo, phone: 42360188
Ring to put your name down for chickens. Deliveries at Regular intervals

Chickens supplied by Brian Larkins Poultry, 20 Nattai St, Tahmoor, phone: 46819722

References

Alana Moore, (1998) Backyard Poultry

L. Woodrow (1996) The Permaculture Home Garden

Local Government (Orders) Regulation 1999 – Schedule 5, Division 2, 3 & 4

Jackie French (1993) Jackie French's Chook Book

A. Lee & P. Foreman (1999) Chicken Tractor – The Permaculture Guide to Happy Hens

Websites

www.agric.nsw.gov.au

www3.turboweb.net.au/~garrys/links/poultry.html

<http://members.iinet.net.au/~greggles1/>

<http://chickenoverload.tripod.com/>



Keeping Chooks

There are a many good reasons for keeping a small number of hens in the backyard of the suburban house. Chooks are an elegant solution to common garden chores such as weeding, fertilising, tilling and controlling pests.

Keeping chooks can assist households to live more sustainably by recycling kitchen scraps into fertilisers and having the added bonus of producing delicious fresh eggs. Some breeds also make good pets.

Originating in the wild forests of Asia, chickens lived in small flocks of one rooster and his harem, feeding on the forest floor with a diet of fallen fruit, leaves, worms, grubs and insects.

Many different breeds have been developed over the centuries. Choose a breed that suits your climate and situation and gives you the yield you want most eg Eggs, Meat or Eggs and Meat.



Australorp

Regulations

Government Orders state that fowls must be kept at least **4.5 metres away from any place** used for making, preparing, selling or storing food.

Poultry should not be a nuisance or a health risk, and yards must be kept clean and free from odours

Housing

Housing should protect from the wind and rain and rapid changes in temperature. The house should always be dry and well ventilated but not draughty.

There are **many designs** available for poultry sheds for example...

* **The deep litter method** is a simple but effective way to keep chooks, using a deep covering of litter on the floor, somewhere for the birds to roost and an enclosed yard for them to exercise.

* **Chook tractors** involve the use of portable structures where the chickens can weed, scratch and manure the beds and are then moved to the next area ready for the next crop.

The accommodation must be robust enough to exclude foxes and dogs. Your poultry need to be closed in at night to protect them from such predators.



Provide 1-2 nest boxes per five birds

Bedding

Ideally the chook shed should be sited facing north with the nest boxes on the cooler eastern or southern walls. It may be wise to **insulate** the underside of the roof to prevent the heat stressing the birds.

Roosts or perches should be all be at the same level to prevent birds soiling each other and far enough from the wall to prevent chilling. **Nest boxes** can have an open top or be located so the eggs can be collected without going in the pen.

Keep a 15cm **thick mulch** of wood shavings, rice hulls, dry leaves, soil, shredded newspaper or peanut hulls. Straw is NOT the best because it does not absorb moisture and the stalks are hollow, allowing mites and other pests to hide and

breed within. Add more bedding material as it decomposes.

Keep the litter deep and dry, any wet or caked mulch should be removed as soon as possible as it can contribute to infections.

Add to the **compost** to finish as fresh manure on the garden may burn plants.

Watering & Feeding

A constant supply of **fresh drinking water** must always be available. Chickens have a bad habit of fouling their water so its best to provide waterers which prevent the birds scratching litter into them and ones which catch spillages, rather than open pans or dishes. It is important to keep the water cool in summer.

An adequate and varied diet will include greens, insects, grains and grit. It is usual to **feed first thing in the morning**, so the chooks have all day to use up the feed. Leave nothing for unwanted visitors at night including eggs. Commercial feed is

available from produce stores which are complete “balanced” rations. **Household scraps** can be fed or mixed with cereals as a wet mash or vegetable scraps used as a supplement to pellets.

Because chickens have no teeth they must be provided with a **supply of grit** to digest food. By swallowing these small stones they are able grind down their food within their gizzard. Shell grit is the most common grit given, but granite and oyster grit can also be used.

Regular cleaning and disinfection are good safeguards against the build up of disease causing organisms and external parasites



Provide at least 10cm space per bird at the feeder and drinker

How to avoid problems

The chook shed should be free from large cracks and holes to exclude predators. Use a fine (1x2)cm wire mesh around the frame and under the floor to **prevent little birds and mice** moving in especially if you don't have a concrete floor. Lay the wire mesh along the ground under the shed, extending past the outside walls by at least 60cm. You can pin it down using small tent pegs and cover with soil to a shallow depth.

Roosters are not needed for egg production but if you do have a **noisy rooster**, try the following suggestion. Roosters tend to take the highest roost in the pen, when they crow they need to extend their neck upwards. As a means of limiting their early morning calls, locate the top roosting spot close enough to the roof to prevent the rooster being able to fully extend its neck.