



Chicken

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

The **chicken** (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) is a type of domesticated fowl. It is a descendant of the wild Indian and southeast Asian Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) and Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*).

Average Life Expectancy, females: 5-7 years

Average Life Expectancy, males: 8-10 years

Terminology

Adult Female: Hen

Adult Male: Rooster or Cock

<1 year old Female: Pullet

<1 year old Male: Cockerel

DIET

Primary diet: Hens that are actively laying eggs need to be fed a Layer formula diet. Layer formula diet is higher in calcium and protein, and helps prevent some common problems associated with chronic egg laying. Layer pellets should always be available. Roosters should be fed an Adult Maintenance pellet.

Fruits/Vegetables: Chickens enjoy berries, chopped vegetables, and leafy greens. Corn in any form is a favorite treat (scratch, frozen thawed, canned), although it should only be offered in small amounts (less than $\frac{1}{4}$ cup daily) as it has little nutritional value. Fruits should be limited, as they are high in sugar. Vegetables should be offered daily, $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup depending on size.

Calcium: Laying hens should have oyster shell, an excellent source of calcium, available at all times.

ENVIRONMENT

Enclosure: Chickens can be housed indoors or outdoors. Each chicken requires at least 100 square feet of personal space. If kept outside, chickens need to be kept in a **PREDATOR SAFE** enclosure. Because many predators (raccoons, weasels, dogs, rats) are skilled diggers, the fencing should be buried 12 inches underground, and also covered to protect against aerial predators (hawks, falcons, and eagles). Fencing should be "doubled", and spaced at least 6" apart because predators will grab chickens through the fencing while they sleep.

Bedding: Straw, hay, and shavings can be used but need be changed often to avoid bacterial or fungal growth within the bedding. Paper-based bedding such as Carefresh and Yesterday's News can also be used.

Temperature: Chickens are very adaptable and can handle a wide temperature range. Care should be taken to provide extra shade or to bring indoors if the temperature rises above 85°F. Provide ceramic heat lamps or bring indoors if the temperature drops below 45°F.

Furniture: Provide nest boxes for egg laying. Always provide clean, dry bedding in nest boxes. Most chickens prefer to perch at night, so provide multiple natural wood roosting perches or ropes as well.

MEDICAL CARE

Exams: Bring chickens in for an exam once a year for an annual exam, bloodwork, and a fecal test to check for parasites. We recommend repeating fecal tests annually, as chickens are prone to parasite infections.

Common Illnesses:

Parasitic Infections: Symptoms include: loss of appetite, weight loss, lethargy, stunted growth, and diarrhea. Treatment includes administering an oral anti-parasitic medication and repeating fecal tests.

Egg Binding: Usually caused by poor nutrition and lack of calcium. Symptoms include: cessation of egg laying, lethargy, and weight loss. This is a very serious condition, and if egg binding is suspected, the hen needs to be treated immediately.