



# Bringing Home Chickens

This presentation is meant to provide a basic checklist for creating a system for egg laying chickens. This is not meant to be exhaustive but rather is more like a quick-start guide with some tips and tricks:

**Shelter (brooder):** Any tub, container or closed-in area.

- 100 gallon steel water trough works great.
- Bedding of wood chips, about 4-6 inches deep works great. Newspapers or dried leaves could also work but need to be changed more frequently.

**Water:** Pet bowls or gravity water dispensers are widely available.

- Water and feed delivery are often different for small chicks compared to adults.
- Make sure the chicks cannot fall in and drown if using a bowl.
- The first time you bring them home you must show them where the water source is by picking them up and placing their beaks in the water until they drink. Chickens are dumb and may not find water without this step.



**Food:** Pellets and crumbles are commercially available in bags like pet food.

- Baby egg layers and meat birds require more protein until they are mature. This is denoted by the word "starter feed" on the bag label.
- Organic starter and adult chicken feed are available but not at every outlet so if you want organic just shop around. (Sources include local feed stores/farmers co-op, grocery delivery companies like Azure Standard, national brands like Tractor Supply Company).
- Metal trash cans, Gamma seal containers or gamma lids on food-grade buckets are great at storing food while keeping critters out.



## Bringing Home Chickens *(continued)*

**Heat:** Maintain the minimum temperature specified by your breed.

- Electric heat lamps with red bulbs work great.
- Red heat bulbs are great for nighttime or anytime while white light is better for daytime only.
- If using heat lamps be sure to secure the lamp so it cannot fall on the bedding and start a fire!  
(Clamps or chains could be used for this).
- Ambient temperature in a garage or a basement may be warmer than an outbuilding.



After about 2 months in the brooder or when their feathers change color from yellow chick fuzz to their adult coloring they will be ready to moved to a larger enclosure. The single main point here is that their home needs to be able to resist predators such as raccoons, coyotes, rats, hawks, snakes and bigfoot.

The coup in the photo is commercially bought, but if you choose to make your own enclosure note the following:

- Birds like to perch and roost (nest) off the ground.
- Protection from above and below from predators.





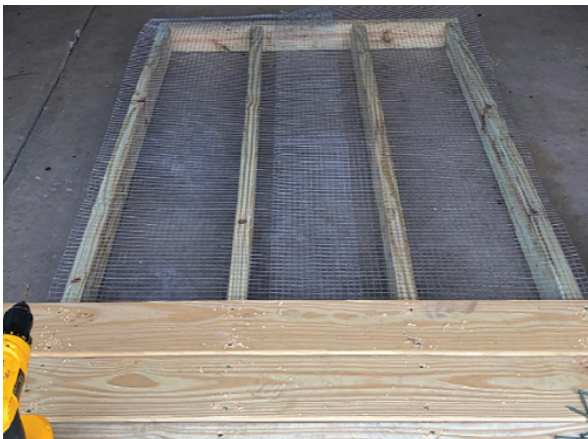
## Bringing Home Chickens *(continued)*

### Securing Your Shelter

This is an example of my outdoor coup setup (in the city) that progressed over time so maybe it will be a shortcut for somebody else:



- Treated lumber and exterior fasteners were used.
- Movable dog fencing to keep chickens in and most daytime predators out. Note this was also within a fenced in suburban backyard.
- Place the coup on a wooden deck or rubber mat to secure the floor from predator intrusion.
- Garden bird netting to keep hawks out and chickens inside.
- 1/4 inch wire mesh below deck boards to prevent rats chewing from underneath.
- Wheels were later added to the deck: (Swivel wheels to make the deck/ coup system movable and chain to be able to pull the deck by hand).



## Bringing Home Chickens *(continued)*

Cold weather accommodations include:

- Heat lamp, heated dog bowl, and ample bedding.
- Follow safe procedures for running electric to your shelter.
- Reinforce shelter from storms, as need for your region, with tarps, roofing felt, house wrap, house siding insulation.



### CONTINUING CARE

**Bedding:** For bedding I choose wood chips because they are effective, readily available and low cost. I store open bags in a large plastic trash can to keep the mess down and prevent rodents from making a bed.

- I have refined my bedding process to include the following:
- Base layer (thin) of horse pellets to soak up liquids.
- Small pine chips to cover the floor of the nesting box.
- Large pine chips for comfort and warmth as needed.





## Bringing Home Chickens *(continued)*

- Diatomaceous Earth mixed in to keep bugs down.
- Food grade or garden grade.
- I exchange the bedding every 2-4 weeks in the summer.
- I exchange the bedding every 1-3 months in the winter.
- To refresh the nesting box bedding without exchanging the entire bed I use dog poop bags to remove poop from the top then add more large (cedar/pine) wood chips on top.
- Straw and large wood chips are used in the chicken run and pasture as needed.



**Clipping wings:** Chickens can fly and jump about 4 feet off the ground in my experience.

- To reduce escaping, I clip the wings so they cannot get more than about 2 feet off the ground.
- I clip the chick at about the 3-month mark or when I think they might jump over the fence. Only a fraction of the tips of the wings need cut to keep them from taking flight. Note that I do not want to cut any part of the wing and just the feather tips.
- I clip the adults about once per season or as needed.
- After the first clipping, the chickens learn they cannot jump over the fence so they mostly stop trying to escape.
- If they do escape see the net I use on the next page.



**Other Highlights:** Fishing net for rounding up, herding or catching loose chickens.

- This 16 inch diameter fishing net works for my medium sized breed.
- The red crayfish net also worked but had a short handle.
- A leaf rake also works for herding.
- Now, when the chickens see me with the net in my hand they just go to where they are supposed to be.



## Bringing Home Chickens *(continued)*



*Chicken bath for self cleaning.* Chickens will clean themselves naturally so I make an advantageous mixture and place it in the rubber bowl. There are recipes online but this is what I remember:

- 1 part of Diatomaceous Earth – food grade
- 2 parts of Play sand
- 1 part of Charcoal
- 4 parts of Clay/dirt

### *Egg laying:*

- I use plastic eggs in the nesting box to help teach the chickens where they are supposed to leave me their nutritious eggs.
- I positioned the nesting box doors in a convenient location so I can extract the eggs easily.
- Most laying chicken breeds produce 1 egg every 1-2 days.
- Generally, chickens produce eggs for 2-3 years.
- Egg production drops in cold weather and low daylight conditions but will pick up again in the summer. (Heat lamps and daylight bulb can help increase production in the winter but will shorten the amount of time they lay overall (to 1-2 years for example.)
- Laying chickens (females) may become “broody” where they have instincts to hatch a baby chicken. (Egg production will drop during this time but they will resume normal production afterwards.)
- Techniques to reduce broodiness duration can be found online but we like to cut off access to the nesting box and keep them cool with plenty of drinking water and shade.

