

The New Craze in Town - Keeping chickens.

No official statistics exist for how many chickens live in people's back gardens or yards, with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs only monitoring farms that keep more than 40 birds, however estimates vary from 140,000 hobby owners to as many as 750,000 - up from well below 50,000 a decade ago. I am one of them and love every minute of it!!!

It isn't for everyone; if you value your perfectly striped grass and pretty flower beds it isn't for you but if you love animals then it's not as difficult as you may think. I started off with two hybrids (a cross breed chicken) which lay a large number of eggs and soon got hooked on the hobby and now have 13, all different sizes, temperament and egg laying ability.



Getting started - A nice thing to do is check with your neighbours! Legally you can keep up to 50 birds, however some house deeds have restrictions on keeping livestock. Firstly you will need to get a chicken house, known as a coop. There are plenty available on the internet, I would advise to always buy one bigger than you need!

The next expense will be the chicken run. You will need this to be 'predator safe'. There are plenty of websites that can provide details. I personally let my girls roam around the garden during the day and they put themselves to bed at dusk!

Next is the feed - Your chickens will need properly formulated Poultry Food (Mixed Corn, Layers Mash and/or Pellets) that is the correct type for their age, for growth, sustenance and to produce eggs if they are hens of egg laying age. You should also include oyster shell, this is digested by the hen and contains calcium, most of which is used to form strong egg shells and grit which the chickens use to help grind down their food (as they don't have teeth). Lastly but most importantly they need a constant supply of fresh drinking water.



Worming - This should be done at least twice but preferably four times a year. This is easily done by buying a worming powder from your vet that is mixed in with the chickens normal feed or you can buy ready mixed feed with wormer already added.

Cleaning Out - Unfortunately as with most pets this has to be done but doesn't take too long.

The fun bit- Now you have to decide on your chickens. There are over 200 recognised breeds of chicken around the World, each with their own personality and egg laying ability. I personally love having different coloured egg shells.



Things to look out for - Scaly leg is a disease of chickens and other birds. It is caused by a parasitic mite, *Knemidocoptes mutans*. It is painful for the birds but can be treated with various medications and creams.

Red mite - live in the cracks of chicken houses (typically under perch ends) coming out at night, crawling onto your birds for a feed. They are very difficult to get rid of and can cause stress, anaemia and even death in bad cases. There are a few treatments on the market but once these mites are present it is quite difficult to eradicate them.

Adding to your flock - there is a natural pecking order in chickens so if you are thinking of adding to your flock this may cause stress.

Broody chickens, soft eggs, escapees...the list could go on. it can be hard work but very rewarding

I hope that this has given you a little insite into keeping chickens. Both myself and Toby Phillips keep chickens and are always available for a chat and to give any advise and if we don't know....we can always try our best to find out .

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