

GETTING STARTED GUIDE TO RAISING CHICKENS FOR EGGS



Because we want to be sure that the food we eat is as organic and free of pesticides and chemicals as possible, we raise both egg-laying hens and meat chickens. When we made the switch from eating supermarket eggs to eating the eggs produced by our own egg-laying hens it was instant love! There simply is no comparison between the taste of a supermarket egg, and the egg from one of our own barnyard chickens! If you are considering raising chickens for eggs, in this “Getting Started Guide” I want to help you learn the basics to raising natural, free range, egg-laying chickens. I think you need to start by determining your answer to some very basic questions:

1. *Do you like Chickens?*

This seems like a no-brainer, but be sure you have spent a little time around chickens. Do you like what you see, or do their pecky personalities drive you nuts?

2. *Do you have the time?*

Chickens are lower maintenance than any other farm animal, but they do require *daily* maintenance. If you've been growing your own veggies, you've been able to let your garden rest during the winter months; but when you have chickens, unless you have someone to provide for them when you leave you are stuck with them year-round. We spend about 10 minutes a day managing our chickens.

3. *Do you have the space?*

Free-range chickens require 1 square feet per chicken while in the coop, and as much as 10 square feet per bird in the pasture while they are out during the day. If you plan on keep your chicken enclosed during the day, then you will need at least 3 square feet per chicken.

4. *Can you afford it?*

Getting started with chicks and their supplies will cost money. There are a lot of DIY ways to economize, but there is still an upfront investment. And unless you have dozens of egg-laying hens, you will probably be doing well to just break even, at least until you have paid off the initial investment.

5. *How many chickens do you need?*

When considering how many chickens to get, you need to figure out how many eggs your family eats per week. For example, my family eats about 3 dozen eggs per week. I suggest purchasing a chicken breed that will produce at least 4 eggs per week. Keep in mind that most chickens start laying around 5-6 months of age and will keep laying for 3 years.

Since my family needs 36 eggs per week and one chicken produces 4 eggs, then we need 9 hens. $9 \times 4 = 36!$
Pssss...we have WAY more than 9 hens because we love them so much and sell their eggs to our local friends.

6. *Will your neighbors and neighborhood be cool with you having chickens?*

It's so sad to me that keeping chickens is illegal in some areas. So check your local government and/or HOA and find out if it's even legal to raise chickens where you live. In our last house we had a close neighbor who could hear our rooster in the mornings. Thankfully, he loved our chickens... and especially our eggs!

7. *Do you need a rooster?*

You do not need a rooster in order for your chickens to lay eggs. Your hens will lay eggs regardless. However, some people like having a rooster around for several reasons. One, they help protect the ladies. They are always on alert watching the sky for hawks. Two, they fertilize the eggs. So if you are hoping to have a sustainable flock, then you will need a rooster to do it's job at fertilizing. And yes, you can eat fertilized, fresh eggs! Three, they crow! We love having the sounds of a rooster on the farm, but if you live in city limits, then you might have restrictions.

8. *Where do I order chicks from?*

We recommend finding a local breeder near you is the best way to order. You can see the chicks, ask the owner questions, and learn from the breeder. Craigslist is a great place to find local sources.

If you can't find a local breeder then you can look into online hatcheries. We've ordered from [this one](#) a few times and our chicks are always healthy.

Once you have answered those basic questions, you are good to go! Let's begin in this guide by looking at some of the perks.

PERKS OF RAISING YOUR OWN EGG CHICKENS

Whether you are joining the current trend of raising a few chickens in the backyard of your city home, or building an entire flock of pastured, free-range, egg-laying chickens on your homestead or farm, many of the perks will be the same.

One great benefit is the opportunity it gives you to be more environmentally friendly by recycling your food and yard waste, thereby keeping it out of the overfilled, toxic landfills around the nation. The cycle is simple: you throw your kitchen and yard scraps to your chickens (they consider these scraps a *delicacy*), they give you nitrogen-rich, fertilized poop, which you compost with leaves and other untreated yard waste to feed your gardens, and at the end of the cycle you are able to harvest wonderful organic fruits and vegetables.

Your free-range chickens are also great pest exterminators! They love to eat protein-packed insects and the weeds that breed these insects.

One of the perks that is really important to our farm is the opportunity we have to preserve rare heritage breeds of chickens, which have been threatened with extinction because of factory-farm operations. This may be something you would like to be involved in, and we recommend you research this opportunity more, beginning [here](#).

There is one additional perk that you may want to consider. Chickens can be great stress-relievers when you need a little attitude adjustment. Watching the antics of your personality-filled chickens can be just as renewing as petting your cat or dog. That's something to cluck about!

BREEDS FOR GOOD LAYING

For many first-time chicken raisers, the main incentive for raising chickens is a fresh supply of eggs. There just is no better feeling than reaching into their nesting boxes and pulling out a basket full of fresh warm eggs! But the breed of chicken you get makes a huge impact on the amount of eggs you should expect to receive each day.

There's a few things to consider when you are picking out a chicken breed. The biggest difference between heritage and industrial breeds is that heritage breeds are more sustainable because they will go *broody* for you and hatch out chicks. They are also more hardy, have better mothering instincts and make more proficient free rangers.



1. Are they hardy and heat/cold tolerant?
2. Are they productive at free-ranging and hunting down their own food during the day? This greatly reduces the cost of feed.
3. Are they known to go “broody” and reproduce easily? If so, then you can let mother hen hatch out baby chicks every spring/summer.
4. Are they able to produce 4 or more eggs each week?

Here is a brief list of 10 of the best egg laying chicken breeds:

1. *Leghorn (industrial breed)*— 6 eggs per week and most productive egg layer. They have a full white body and a large thick red comb. Their eggs are extra large and white. They are rough and resilient, and rarely ever turn *broody* because they are a commercial/industrial breed.

2. *Rhode Island Red (heritage breed)*— **6 eggs per week.** These originated in America, and can be used for either eggs or meat. They have brown and black feathers, giving them a dark appearance. They are tough and capable of looking after themselves. They lay lots of eggs, up to 250 per year. These eggs are also medium sized and brown. Because they are a heritage breed, they will go *broody* if you let them. These are my favorite breed!
3. *Ameraucana (heritage breed)*—**4 eggs per week.** These chickens are famous for their colored eggs (usually blue or olive). They exhibit a wonderful combination of colors and color patterns. In 4 years of having this breed, I have never had one go *broody*.
4. *Black Australorp (heritage breed)*- **4 eggs per week.** These chickens are one of the best dual purpose (egg and meat) breeds. They lay large brown eggs and grow out to nearly 7lbs. Many people raise this breed to create a more sustainable flock. The hens are known to go *broody* and be great mothers. At 16 weeks, the roosters are large enough to process for meat.
5. *Plymouth Rock (heritage breed)*— **3 eggs per week.** Also called the Barred Rock, these chickens lay around 200 small, medium sized, brown eggs each year. They are mostly grey with white stripes wrapping around their body. It is a large bird that is well suited to a free range lifestyle. They are very friendly.
6. *Buff Orpington (heritage breed)* —**3 eggs per week.** These chickens, originally from England, are a backyard chicken keeper's dream. They lay around 180 eggs a year. They tend to get broody during the summer months, which is why they lay less than the other breeds mentioned. They are a beautiful golden-yellow color and have a thick layer of feathers. They are one of the tamest breeds you will find, and make a great garden pet.
7. *Wyandotte (heritage breed)*- **3 eggs per week.** These are one of the most beautiful breeds I've ever seen. They lay

large brown eggs and are great mothers. They grow out to be nearly 7 lbs and make a great dual-purpose bird.

8. *Hamburg (industrial breed)*- **4 eggs per week**. Although egg size is medium they are small eaters and cost less to keep than most breeds.
9. *Minorca (industrial breed)* - **4 eggs per week**. They are very large chickens that lay extra large white eggs. They are non-setters (won't go broody).
10. *Chantecler (critically endangered heritage breed)* - **3 eggs per week** –The Chantecler originated in the Quebec Province of Canada and is a fine example of a dual-purpose breed. This breed is noted for its ability to withstand harsh winters. My chancellors continue to lay medium-sized brown eggs in the coldest of winters and have gone *broody*.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR CHICKS

Well, the obvious last thing you need before you are raising chickens is *chickens*. You may choose to purchase some young chickens to begin your flock instead of baby chicks. We began that way several years ago. For this guide, let's begin with the last first so you can take to time to consider carefully how you begin. Here are a couple of things to consider when making this choice.

Should you get straight-run or sexed chicks?

Straight run includes both the male and females. Sexed means they are separated. Most people order sexed females for laying and might throw in a rooster.

Should I get vaccinated chicks?

We have never paid the extra money for vaccinated chicks. You will see that option available if you order from an online hatchery, however we feel that healthy chickens do not need vaccinations. The diseases that they vaccinate against are brought on by stress and unhealthy management. Take care of your chickens and you can raise them just fine naturally.

What do I feed them?

You will feed your new chicks starter feed for the first 2 months. Then you will transition them to a grower feed until the start laying eggs. Next you will transition them to a layer feed for the remainder of their egg-laying life.

You can usually find day-old chicks at local hatcheries and farm stores. If you purchase from the farm store, you will be able to keep your flock growing by getting more chickens from the same place you get your feed. Most chicks will cost about \$3 each, and you'll have to be patient for six months while they grow to begin producing eggs.

Ready-to-lay hens are about 20 weeks old and just about to start laying. They will cost more than chicks, but you will have your eggs sooner. Called *pullets*, they are all female and ready to produce eggs. You can usually order them through your farm store, or directly from a hatchery, and we have found some on Craigslist.

Once you've decided which chicken—chick or pullet—you will begin with, you will need to get the chicken-keeping tools and supplies you will need. The following list will help you get ready.

CHICK SUPPLIES

BROODER

You will need an area to keep your chicks safe for 3 weeks. It will need to be at least 1 square foot per chick. They will need heat and good protection from predators (mice, rats, cats, older chickens, etc). We once lost 25 day-old chicks to one rat in one night. This is why some people prefer to keep their chickens in their house or garage during this time.

You will need something to keep them confined. You can use a [rubbermaid bin](#), a cardboard box, or even a bathtub.

Next you will need to make sure you have a heat source like a 250 watt red light in a reflective housing that provides heat for the chicks, who have no feathers yet to keep them warm. The Brinsea EcoGlow Brooder for Chicks ([Here](#)) uses less power and is much safer than a traditional bulb.

Hang the light about 18 inches above them. If there is a mama hen, then you won't need this because she will be keeping them warm. If you see them huddling under the light, then it's too cold for them and you need to lower the light. If they are scattering away from the light, then they are too hot.

Raise the light one inch every week for the first 3 weeks and by the time they are 3 weeks old, they can handle cool temperatures.

THERMOMETER

The best ones to use are those used to watch food temperatures, which has a probe on a wire attached to a separate base.

BEDDING

Paper towels work great for a few days because the chicks tend to want to eat the shavings. Place them on top of 8 inches of pine shavings and then switch to just the pine shavings. Cedar is toxic to poultry. Make sure there are enough shavings to keep them dry. Put fresh shavings down each day or consider the deep litter method by adding fresh shavings to the top every day.

FEEDERS AND WATERERS

You are probably feeding a number of chicks, and you don't want them running out of feed or water. You have a couple of choices for a waterer. I prefer to use a small mouth mason jar and hook it up to [this base](#). It's best to put your waterer and feeder on a platform of some kind so the chicks don't track in manure. Just be sure to give the base a good rinse once in a while and remember that galvanized waterers tend to rust quickly.

For the feeder, I just use a small bowl that they can get to easily or a mason jar with a [feeder base](#).

THE DAY THE CHICKS ARRIVE!

If you ordered your chicks from an online hatchery then make sure you put on your order form a good cell number. The post office will call you on the morning that your chicks arrive.

Make sure you have the brooder area all set up. Turn on the heating lamp and get their new home all warmed up. Fill up the water and the chick mash (you can find that at your local feed store).

The chicks will arrive newly hatched and unfed. They can go up to 3 days without any food or water.

When you bring them home, you will need to take each chick out one-by-one and dip their beak in the water. Mama hen shows the chicks how to drink. You're their new mama!

Make sure their bedding is never wet and add pine shavings to the top of the wet areas.

Watch for pasty butts! Poop can dry and stick to their bottoms. You will need to make sure you remove any poop from their bottoms with warm water.

Keep any pine shavings and manure out of their food and water. I recommend using a piece of wood to place the waterer and feeder on.

BASIC ITEMS FOR ADULT CHICKENS

THE CHICKEN COOP

A safe chicken coop will keep your chickens protected from the weather and from predators. It gives a place to get out of the winter cold, and a place to cool off in the heat of summer. I'll mention some coop options, but all of them need to be safe from owls, hawks, and rodents. They can sneak through standard chicken wire and kill your birds. Use hardware cloth or solid wood or metal when building your coop or repurposing an old building into a coop.

You don't need to spend a lot of money building a coop *mansion* for your chickens. The internet is filled with ideas for repurposing cast-off items, garage sale cheapies, or junkyard finds into DIY chicken coops. Do a little research and find the perfect solution for your chickens.

Here are just a few ideas that could work for you:

- Making a simple coop out of discarded wooden pallets.
- Turn a well-used children's plastic playhouse into a coop.
- Use an old, stripped-down car frame.
- Recycle a large metal water tank.
- Use an old trampoline with a simple add-on plywood coop.
- Use an old swing set frame.
- Turning an old gazebo into a coop
- Repurpose a large old dog house into a coop.
- Start with a backyard dog kennel or run.

Your chickens won't care what the coop looks like as long as it provides for their basic needs. The coop itself needs a roof, four walls, and a doorway for coming in and out. In addition, your egg-layer will want nesting boxes, which are small, individual private little nests where they can be alone and lay their eggs. You will want to be sure there is a larger door that you can open when

you need to clean out the old bedding and add new. Since chickens like to roost, have a couple of poles off the floor where your chickens can perch.

You will also need to have a secure enclosure where your chickens can safely spend their days foraging and doing what good little chickens do. We are blessed with pastures where they can roam freely, eating weeds, grass, and insects. If you are living on a piece of land with large open areas for roaming, you may need to give your chickens a secure chicken run. Remember that standard chicken wire may not be safe from predators. Find a smaller mesh fencing material to use for your chicken run. You will need to cover the top with the same mesh fencing to keep your chickens free from airborne predators like hawks. Because smaller rodents can burrow under your fence, your chickens will be safest if you bury the same small mesh fencing under the area of the chicken run, securing it safely along the fence border.



If you have enough pasture space, you may want to consider using a chicken tractor for the run. A chicken tractor has wheels, which allows you to move the chicken run from spot to spot, assuring your chickens of fresh foraging areas. There are many different designs for chicken tractors. You can find ideas for building your own, including instructions, [here](#).

FOOD AND WATER DISHES

You can find many different ideas online for making your own chicken feeder and waterer. Many of them are simple designs and use repurposed DIY materials. It is important to be sure your chickens have a constant supply of food and water, so just be sure to monitor their needs often. If you prefer to purchase a feeder and waterer, I recommend the Little Giant 11 lbs. Plastic Hanging Poultry Feeder ([here](#)), and the 5 Gallon Chicken Waterer ([here](#)). Be sure that are rinsing the base of the waterer once in a while. If your chickens are free range, and you have an area of barnyard you can dedicate to them, you can scatter some of their favorite feed each morning and have the pleasure of watching them peck away contentedly. We purchased a toilet brush to clean our waterers with and it's perfect!

FOOD

Pastured, free range chickens receive a major part of their diet from their foraging. They are compelled to scratch at the ground, using their toes to scrape the ground in search of various seeds, greens, grit, or insects to eat. Spreading some *scratch grains* like cracked, rolled, or whole grain corn, barley, oats, or wheat keeps them scratching. However, most scratch grains are relatively low in protein and high in energy or fiber. Chickens love table scraps, but excessive scraps can affect egg production, and, if left on the ground too long, bring the threat of rot or botulism. Lawn clippings are suitable only if they have not been sprayed with pesticides.

Some people want to use only organic chicken feed, which can be expensive and hard to locate. You can try making your own organic feed. Here is a [basic organic homemade recipe](#) you can make.

Organic Homemade Poultry Feed Mix

Feeder Oats

Soft white wheat

Hard red winter wheat

Flax Seed

Corn

Split peas

Lentils

Sesame seeds

Kelp

[CLICK HERE](#) to go to the recipe

As you can see, making your own chicken feed requires lots of ingredients that can be hard to find. On our farm, we prefer to use a non-GMO feed that is already premixed for our chickens and ready to serve. [We use this one](#) .

BEDDING

Whatever you choose to use, the bedding in your coop should be at least two inches thick—more is better. There are many bedding materials to choose from, but we think the best is pine wood shavings (not to be confused with pine chips). Pine shavings cost \$6-\$9 per thirty-five pound “compressed” bag. These can be purchased at a pet store or garden supply store. Many areas will have aspen shavings available, and those work too. DON'T use cedar shavings, no matter what friends or your local feed store tell you: the aromatic oils will irritate your birds' lungs, and make them more susceptible to respiratory problems later in life. Other materials, like hay and straw, are either far less absorbent or more likely to become infested. Some materials, like peat moss, are just too dusty.

In the wintertime we like to be a little lazy and do the “deep litter” method for bedding in our chicken coop. You can read more about that on my website [here](#).

TAKING CARE OF YOUR CHICKENS

It will be important for you to know the basic steps you need to follow to keep your chickens laying their eggs, and to keep them healthy and free of disease. Here are some keys to maintaining the health of your flock.

EGG PRODUCTION

Chickens are called long-season breeders, meaning that they come into production as days become longer. That is, they start producing more eggs when there are more hours of light per day. In the winter and when the days

are shorter, they will produce less eggs. Some flock owners provide supplemental lighting. Using a light with a stop/start timer, you can cause the light to come on early in the morning before sunrise and in the evening before sunset to ensure that the length of light exposure for the flock totals fourteen to sixteen hours. Honestly, I don't recommend or use this method. We allow our chickens to have the break they need during the shorter days. Their bodies use a lot of energy and nutrition to produce an egg and we don't believe in forcing them to produce more eggs.

Chickens of any type and age require a complete, balanced diet. The diet of a laying hen needs to be high in calcium, which is needed for the production of eggshells. This level of calcium, however, is harmful to non-laying chickens. Some hens have a higher need for calcium than others. It is always good to have an additional source of calcium available. Oyster shell, usually available in feed stores, is an excellent calcium supplement for a laying flock. We keep a free choice bowl in the chicken coop for the hens to peck at.

To produce effectively, laying hens must have adequate space. The amount of floor space required by a flock depends on the size of the chickens (which is related to the breed of chicken chosen) and the type of housing used. A minimum of 1.5 square feet per hen is recommended, with 2 square feet per hen being the most commonly used space allowance. Larger allowances are required for some of the larger breeds.

ENSURING YOUR FLOCK STAYS HEALTHY

There are a few simple rules to follow to be sure your chickens stay healthy.

KEEP CHICKENS CLEAN

Preventing disease in flocks entails proper management and sanitation practices, such as thorough cleaning of equipment and of facilities with proper disinfectants, and minimizing or eliminating the introduction of new chickens to your flock.

DISINFECT THE COOP

Routine disinfecting of the chicken coop is one of the single most important things you can do to for your flock. Here are some things to keep in mind when disinfecting:

- Clean all coop surfaces with a detergent. Disinfectants work best on cleaned surfaces, but remember that a clean surface does not mean a disease-free surface.

- Disinfectants are not effective immediately after application—they require at least 30 minutes to destroy infectious organisms.
- Warm disinfectant solutions break up residue better than cold solutions.
- Let all surfaces dry completely before using. Remember to follow the manufacturer’s recommendations for dilution and use. Common disinfectants include hydrogen peroxide, iodine and chlorine.

VACCINATE CHICKENS FOR PROBLEMATIC DISEASES

Vaccination is seldom used by small-flock owners due to the expense and limited availability of vaccines, the simple lack of disease in small flocks, the unknown presence of disease and the improper diagnosis of disease.

Vaccination should be performed if birds have had a disease problem in the past, if they are transported on and off premises regularly and if birds are continually introduced to an existing flock.

We don’t vaccinate on our farm and we, also, don’t opt for vaccinations when purchasing chicks from online hatcheries.

QUARANTINE CHICKENS IF NECESSARY

When an unhealthy chicken is noticed, it is important to immediately quarantine it and accurately diagnose the disease. By expediting the treatment of infected birds, you’ll prevent further spread of the disease.

BE AWARE OF TOP CHICKEN DISEASES

In general, a sick chicken is less active, retracts its neck close to its body and has an unkempt appearance, but not all diseases have the same presentation. Here are some common chicken diseases to be aware of:

- *Diarrhea*—This is the most common disease in chickens. It is identified by white or greenish, loose droppings, and is caused by cold, dampness, dirty surroundings and unclean food. Isolate the affected chicken in warm dry quarters, and give her potassium permanganate solution to drink.
- *Pecking and Cannibalism*—Early signs include continuous toe-picking in chicks, pecking at maturing feathers in growing chickens, or head and vent pecking in older chickens. It’s essential to pay close attention to the entire

flock to determine the difference between random pecking and problematic behavior. Normal flock behavior does include the establishment of a “pecking” order.

- *Lice Infestation*—Chickens affected with lice will act nervously, and scratch and peck themselves frequently. Feathers look dry and ruffled. Eventual weight loss and decreased egg production occurs.
- *Coccidiosis*—Chickens exhibit diarrhea, weight loss and pigmentation loss. Severe infections cause bloody diarrhea and could be fatal without treatment.
- *Ascariidiasis (Roundworm)*—Symptoms: Common signs in chickens are diarrhea and weight loss. In severe infestation, masses of adult worms can cause a blockage of the intestine, which can be fatal if not treated. When large numbers of larvae or immature worms migrate through the lining of the gut, they cause severe inflammation.

USING ESSENTIAL OILS ON CHICKENS

To be successful using essential oils on chickens you must first understand that chickens breathe differently than mammals. They do not have a diaphragm, and use the rib cage and breast bone to move the air in and out of the body. Their lungs rely on air sacs to distribute oxygen to their bodies. As a result, chickens breathe in higher concentrations of oxygen and whatever else in is the air. ([Source](#))

A buildup of fumes from chicken droppings, spilled water and cleaning products irritates their breathing system and leads to illness. So using a coop cleaner made with natural products will clean the coop without irritating the chicken’s respiratory system.

Lemon essential oil and other citrus fruits have natural cleaning capabilities. You can easily make a homemade coop cleaner that is easy on your nose and easy on the chicken’s respiratory tract. [Here's a recipe](#) for cleaning out the old shavings and coop bedding, and to spray down the coop.

You can also make a salve ointment with essential oils for chicken care. You will find my all-purpose recipe using lavender and melaleuca essential oils [here](#). Coconut oil is also a great carrier oil to use for homemade chicken ointment.

Heavily diluted oregano essential oil is used by many chicken owners for many uses. Using essential oils for chicken care is a wonderful natural approach. Just make sure you do your own research so you are comfortable with the choice that is right for you to use.

You can also find a recipe for Natural Garlic Juice Spray [here](#). We like to add a few cloves of garlic to our chicken's waterer. The garlic infuses the water and provides a good immune support every time they take a drink of water.

HERBS FOR CHICKEN HEALTH

Much research has been done to determine herbs safe for chickens. You can use fresh herbs to keep your chickens in excellent health and producing high-quality eggs. Many of these herbs can be foraged for, grown at home, or purchased online. The [following list](#) is some of the most commonly available healthy herbs for your chickens.

- *Garlic*—Excellent for chicken health as it commonly acts as an antibacterial and antiviral agent. Not only does it work hard to prevent infection but it is a well-known egg-laying stimulant. I like to keep a fresh clove of crushed garlic in my chickens' water along with a splash of apple cider vinegar. Offer raw garlic to your chooks year 'round.
- *Nettles*—Nettles are a green food powerhouse! Full of calcium for egg shell development, protein for plant-based energy, manganese, phosphorus, and potassium for overall well-being.
- *Alfalfa*—Another super nutritive herb. Complete amino acids, good protein and minerals...not to mention an excellent source for chlorophyll. Not only do I line the girls' run, coop, and nesting boxes with alfalfa—I use it in my supplement. It's my go-to grass replacer and it keeps my hens healthy for breeding and egg production. (Watch for GMO alfalfa. Ask your feed store or livestock provider about the source of their alfalfa...buy direct and local if possible.)
- *Dandelion leaf and flowers*—Give 'em all they want of this stuff! If you can't bring yourself to eat them...give them to your chickens or give them to your chicken-loving neighbors

and friends. Dandelions are a complete food and give amazing power to the immune system. (If using fresh...just be sure you get them from a yard/park/public area that you know hasn't been sprayed with junk.)

- *Fennel seed*—This stimulates continual egg laying.
- *Marjoram*—Another brilliant egg-laying stimulant.
- *Comfrey leaf*—Comfrey is one of my most favorite herbs! I don't get excited about all of the hype/controversy it has received the past few years. What I do know, is that it is rich in protein and it is a very nutritious food. It contains high levels of calcium, potassium, and plenty of amino acids. If chickens are fed comfrey, they will have superior health and produce eggs with most beautiful looking yolks you've ever seen.
- *Chickweed*—Another herb that grows like a weed in many places and a great green food tonic for chickens.

Herbal Feed Supplement Recipe

You can make the following [homemade herbal feed supplement](#) for your chickens.

Ingredients

All herbs should be dried. Please use organically-grown or wild-crafted plant materials whenever possible. Parts are measured by volume not weight.

Nettle leaf

Alfalfa leaf

Marjoram

Dandelion leaf

Chickweed

Fennel seed

Minced garlic

Comfrey leaf

To see how to make this recipe, [please click here](#).

NOW IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GET THOSE CHICKS

Maybe you've thought a hundred times, "I want to start raising my own chickens so we can have some yummy, organic, fresh eggs each morning." Stop just thinking about it—*you can do it!* With the information in this brief guide, and your own research online, you can have those chickens clucking away out in the backyard or field, giving you fresh, healthy eggs to feed your family.

Your Homework:

1. Before you purchase chicks you will need to buy your supplies and/or build your chicken coop
2. Set up your brooder and have it ready for when the chicks arrive
3. When they are 3 weeks old, you will move them out of the brooder and into their new chicken coop or tractor. Please keep them protected from hawks, dogs, cats, etc.
4. At 8 weeks, switch to a grower feed.
5. At 16 weeks you can butcher the roosters if you purchased any or if one of your layers turned out to be a rooster. And yes, eat it!
6. 5-8 months your hens will start to lay and continue to lay 3-6 eggs a week for the next 2 years. Switch to a layer feed and make sure they are getting grit or oyster shell free-choice.
7. At around 2 years, order new chicks to replace your older hens.

What do you do with older hens? We butcher hens that are 3 years old and use them as "stewing hens" in a recipe. At 3 years old their production will decline

and you will find them eating more than laying. See my recipe on how to cook a stewing hen.

Sources

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