

Are you ready?

The chicken-house should be bought and set up before buying any chickens, and there are several options available for housing so take the time to decide which is the best option.

A lockable door or pop-hole is essential to keep out predators such as foxes and cats. Ventilation is important to provide fresh air while preventing draughts, and a run which is partially covered to give some shelter from the weather.

In the coop I recommend lining the floor with a hardwearing plastic sheet as this protects the floor but also makes for ease of cleaning! On top of that cover the floor in about 2 cm of wood shavings.

In the nest box put a couple of hand fulls of straw so the hens can get comfy to lay you an egg!

Feeders and drinkers

We keep our feeders hung up within the house to ensure the food stays dry and that the hens don't scratch or waste the food, it also helps prevent vermin.

The drinker is best raised above ground level on bricks or suspended to prevent the chickens scratching soil and dirt into it, some drinkers have foldable legs already on them.

Handling your hens

To pick up a hen encircle its body with your hands, holding the wings down while supporting the body from below. Picking it up with its head towards your body reduces the possibility of getting covered in droppings from a nervous bird! The chicken may then be carried by placing it under one arm gently to prevent it extending and flapping its wings.

Chicken Behaviour

Chickens are social birds that develop a 'pecking order', with the dominant birds controlling movement, feeding and socialisation of those less dominant.

Some of the most common behaviour shown by chickens are...

Broodiness: A hen will sit on the nest box making it unavailable to other hens. This is useful if there are fertile eggs needing incubation, otherwise temporary separation can be used to stop this behaviour.

Feather pecking: Sometimes hens will attack other birds, even drawing blood. The priority is to treat the victim with a veterinary antiseptic. If the problem persists, remove the culprit into a temporary pen within sight of the other birds. Hopefully the separation will cure the problem.

Moulting: Old feathers are shed and new feathers grow to replace them. It usually happens around once a year .



A little guide on how to care for your hens



If you have read this guide and still have any questions then call us on

01752 426422

We're not vets but we have a lot of experience!

www.poultrypeople.co.uk

Collecting the hens

Ideally a cat/dog type crate or carrier or a cardboard box with plenty of ventilation holes. The average cat carrier will hold 2 birds.

Can I mix different breeds together?

Generally yes. As our hybrids are reared in batches of mixed breeds then it's not a problem as they are reared together, however sometimes we do come across a very timid or bossy hen, and it is obviously best not to select these two hens to live together.

We recommend finding a breeder who rears the different breeds together to avoid any problems!

When I get home?

Put them directly into the house if early in the day keep them in the house for 2/3 hours and then let them out in the run, it's best to let them get used to the house and run for at least three days prior to letting them free range completely. If later in the day, keep them in the house overnight before letting them out.

If introducing more birds into the flock, place new birds in the house as above with the old birds outside, when the new birds are already at roost let the older birds into the house. In the morning open the chicken house as normal. If they are completely free range it will be best to keep them in a smaller area for the first 2/3 days for them to settle down. You will just need to keep an eye on your hens for the first 48 hours while they settle down.

Day to Day Care

So you have your hens—here's how to care for them.

There are a variety of brands of food available which provide all of the nutrients that chickens need; this is best provided in a feeder allowing the birds to help themselves. A hen will eat roughly 100/150 gms of food a day. Fresh food including sweet corn, lettuce will also be appreciated, as will grains such as wheat and corn. Hens spend most of the day scratching and pecking for food so scatter the fresh food on the ground to allow them to forage, otherwise they can become bored and develop bad habits such as feather pecking.

Fresh water should always be available in a drinker raised above ground level. During the winter months check that the water hasn't frozen but also be mindful that during hot weather they will drink more!

Grit to aid digestion and crushed oyster shell to provide calcium used in the production of the egg shell also need to be given in a separate container, Mixed grit contains both of these.

When it comes to cleaning them out people take different approaches the 2 main ones being "poo picking" the coop and adding more bedding if necessary everyday then a complete clean once a month. The second approach is just doing a complete clean weekly. It's up to you how you clean the coop as long as there is clean, dry bedding.

Parasites

... are easily controlled if you clean the hen house properly and generally look after your hens.

Red Mite

These tiny mites vary in appearance, depending on when they last fed – a mite is only red when it has consumed blood recently and changes colour again through black to grey as the interval between feeds increases. When checking housing areas for mite, a tell-tale 'grey ash' around crevices is evidence of mite faeces, but the best time to examine a house is at night, when the mite can often be seen with the aid of a torch, both on and off the bird.

For prevention/ treatment I recommend Smite Organic Powder to treat birds and Smite Professional to treat the house.

Worms

It is recommended that you worm your hens. If you don't and the hens get a build up of worms, a large percentage of the food you buy for your hens will actually be feeding the worms, it is false economy not to worm them. If you never worm your hens they will not be healthy, will lay less eggs and eat much more food just to maintain their weight. To worm the birds I recommend either Verm X or Flubenvet.