



Introduction

Chickens are very easy going pets. For just a few minutes daily care you'll be rewarded with the tastiest, freshest eggs and their lovable characters. All you need to do is provide them with a clean, dry house that is free from pests and safe from predators, a supply of food and water and space to roam they will live a happy life.

Daily Routine

Letting your hens out

When you get up you can let the chickens out by opening the front door. If you are at home you may want to let your chickens out of the run as well. But if no-one is going to be in and you have foxes which are about during the day it will be safer to leave the chickens in the run.

Check for eggs!

Regular collection will help prevent any damage to the eggs and discourage your chickens from getting broody.

Food and Water

Make sure the feeder is full of layers pellets and the drinker is full of clean water. If it is extremely cold make sure that the water is not frozen preventing the chickens from drinking. In either extremely hot or extremely cold weather it is best to check the water twice a day to make sure the chickens don't go thirsty.

Weather

Its important to offer the hens some weather protection, either natural shelter or a cover/shade.

Weekly Care

Cleaning Out

Keep an eye on the level of droppings and clean out when there is a good covering on the floor. Depending on how many chickens you have this may be every 7 days. The droppings can be dug straight into the vegetable garden, but it is a little too strong to be used fresh in flower beds. Adding the droppings to your compost bin will speed up the process and produce an excellent compost.

Health

Try to check that your birds are healthy every week by picking them up and checking for all the signs of a healthy chicken as outlined in the.

Clean nest area

Refresh the nesting box by cleaning out the straw (or shredded paper), wiping clean and putting a fresh handful in. Don't use hay as this can go mouldy if it gets damp

Monthly Tasks

To disinfect the hen house after cleaning out the hens, use either, poultry shield or all mites pink spray. Also fully clean out the feeder and drinkers.

Food stocktake

Check that you have enough feed for the week ahead. If you run out and have to buy a different brand you may find your chickens won't eat it as they can be quite fussy.

Seasonal Care

When its hot

If the chickens are in the run, make sure that the shade is positioned to give your birds a good area of shade. In hot weather chickens drink much more so keep an extra eye on the water container.

When its cold

If your chickens have large combs, it is a good idea to rub them (the combs!) with vaseline to prevent frostbite. If the drinker is freezing over in the colder months then bring it indoors at night and check it again in the afternoon, (do not add salt, your chickens will not appreciate this!)

Fireworks night

Remember to make sure your chickens are well out of the way. All the bangs and flashes can upset your chickens, so tuck them up in the hen house out of harms way otherwise you may not have an egg for breakfast!

Healthy Hens

Hybrid hens are fully vaccinated and do not require top ups. It is unlikely they will ever experience any serious illness. As a general rule, keep the hen house clean, ensure a fresh supply of water at all times and a proper balanced diet and you should have no problems.

As your chickens are enjoying a natural outdoor life, exposed to wildlife and the elements they can have off days. When it is very hot your chickens will naturally seek out shade and may go off lay for a couple of days. Very stormy or changeable weather can have a similar effect on egg production.

Worming

Just like cats and dogs, it is a good idea to worm your chickens once a year usually in the spring. This is because they can pick up types of worms from the ground which can live in their intestines. If your chickens have stopped laying but are eating lots and have a spot of diarrhea then they may need worming. Another sign is a pink rather than red comb.

Lice and red mites

By keeping the hen house clean you will almost certainly avoid any problems as they like to live in dark, dirty conditions. Lice will be visible as little light brown insects normally on the skin around the vent. Their eggs are laid on the shafts of the feathers and look like a white crust. If the hen house is kept clean and the chickens are dust bathing regularly, they are unlikely to get lice but if they do a simple dusting of lice powder around the infected area will get rid of them. Red mites live in crevices only coming out at night. As there aren't any crevices in the hen house it is extremely unlikely you will ever see them but if you do a thorough clean of the house using a pet safe disinfectant it will effectively get rid of them.

Wing clipping

Although a fully grown chicken can't really fly (you don't often see a flock of chickens flying overhead!) they can do some quite high jumps. So to prevent your chickens from taking off, you can clip a wing. This sounds painful, but is in fact just like a haircut. It involves trimming the primary feathers on one wing, to unbalance them making take off very lopsided! Clipping only the primary flight feathers is painless, a good guide is to cut the first 6-7 feathers back as far as the tips of the next line of feathers.

Moulting

Chickens moult once a year, this lasts about 6 weeks and they lose a lot of feathers starting from the back of the neck and then further back across their bodies until they look quite scruffy. Don't worry, the feathers grow back more splendid and beautiful than before! If you have clipped your chicken's wing you will need to do this again now.

Broodiness

When spring starts to twitch the leaves from the trees your chicken may feel the urge to sit on the nesting box, puff herself up and refuse to budge. It's nothing to worry about she has probably just gone broody. Unless there has been a cockerel about this is going to be a fruitless exercise so at this point you have two options. You can leave her and she will eventually snap out of it but this could take a couple of months. Alternatively you could try to encourage her to resume normal duties. This is a good idea as while she is broody she won't lay any eggs! The first thing to do is to collect any eggs under her, secondly lift her off the nest and restrict access to the nesting box by putting something in it like a ball or flowerpot. If you do this straight away the chicken will usually give up within a couple of days. If they are being really persistent though you may find that the only solution is to dunk the hen in a bucket of cold water! This works because while a chicken is broody they raise their body temperature slightly, the cold water brings their temperature down.

Choosing a Chicken Area

When choosing a spot for your chickens, you should consider the following:

- At least to begin with choose an area close to your house so that it's easy for you to see your hens.
- Choose somewhere sheltered, under a tree or next to a fence.

