

chickens

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The colors of chickens' ears tell you if its shell will be white or brown. Both brown and white leghorns have white ears and lay white eggs. For Rhode Island Reds, New Hampshire and Plymouth Rock chickens: brown ears, brown eggs.

Gathering freshly laid eggs is a daily event for those who own a flock of laying hens. Chatty hens deliver eggs—gifts wrapped in their own packages.

At times the hens' voices can be heard announcing an egg's arrival with a competitive tone of sharp loud cackles: "My egg is bigger than your egg." They have smooth shells, inviting warmth, and come in a variety of colors from soft pastels to warm browns.

If you've been thinking about raising a few chickens, visit a local feed store to select some baby chicks; you can also have them delivered from a hatchery. To ensure happy hens, study different breeds before selecting those cute tiny chicks. For a household of five people, six hens will provide plenty of eggs. Select the breed that fits your needs: fine feathers, plumage colors, hardiness, or egg and meat production. Egg color is important to some people. Arucandas lay pale blue and green eggs. Arucanda (or Easter egg) chickens are beautiful birds with brightly colored feathers, a medium-size body, shy personality, and medium egg production.

Once you picked the breed you like, you'll need hen houses. These can be simple or elaborate. Plans and books are available online, at the county extension office, and at bookstores build your own house or have one delivered. The house will need nests and roosting places.

Attach a hinged side at the back of the nest so you can lift it up and reach into the nest, rather than walking into the hen house to gather eggs. Your shoes will stay clean and the hens will not be disturbed. For a roost, take a hike in the woods to see if you can find a perfect branch for hens to roost on; it should be at least two inches around and long enough to secure on both ends since hens dance about before settling down for the night.

You'll also need a predator-proof pen because skunks can climb or dig under a fence to grab a fresh egg from a nest. Coyotes prefer the chicken rather than the egg. Red Tail Hawks have enough body weight to swoop into a pen like a dive-bomber and grab a chicken on the run. Ravens join the hens scratching in the yard and then snatch an egg as they fly away. The pen needs to be secure on all sides and the top for the best protection.

Hens begin laying at 20 weeks old, and they will lay eggs with or without a jaunty rooster strutting in the flock. If there is no rooster, the ovum will not be fertilized. The eggs are just as nutritious either way. The City of Portland limits backyard chick-

Eggs are "the cement to cuisine together," because they bind, leaven, thicken, and



A 'chicken palace' in The Dalles with architectural lines and colors blending with the main house.



Illustrations by Christiane Moore

ens to three hens and no roosters so late sleeping neighbors aren't called to attention at daylight.

Many breeds of chickens lay one egg every 26 to 28 hours (about one egg a day) for a period of four to six days. Then, after a short rest, the hen starts all over again. Amazing!

Eggshells are porous, so do not soak eggs to remove droppings or dirt. Wash the eggs under lukewarm running water with a rough cloth or soft brush. Cover a wire rack with a towel, and dry the eggs for a few minutes before placing them in a carton or covered container in the refrigerator.

For hens ground oyster shells are a gift from the sea. Set out a dish for them to eat freely. The calcium in oyster shells makes the eggs shells stronger and less likely to crack in the nest.

What holds the castle of chickens because of their ability to calcium and clarify.

No need to throw away broken eggshells. Wash and dry them in an oven with a pilot light on (or very low heat) or in the open air, hung in a mesh bag. After a few days, grind

the shells in a food processor to a powder, store this in a clean jar, and add it around tender new garden plants as needed.

Hens hatch precocial chicks, meaning that newly hatched chicks are up and running in a matter of hours, able to follow their mother and feed themselves. Thus the saying, she's one smart chick!

If you let chickens 'free range,' they'll eat grass, bugs and worms. Chicken tractors are the new rage for chicken lovers: hens roam freely within a fenced enclosure that includes a covered section with feed, water and nesting boxes. The enclosure is moved to new area every two to ten days. Garden scraps give hens fresh food and something to scratch and peck through looking for a special seed or green leaf. Worms from worm compost bins make the hens jump in the air like some people do when given a delicious piece of dark chocolate.

A rooster protects the flock, guiding hens to shelter before a storm using their sharp talons to fight off predators. Roosters crow with style. Some, with an extra dose of personality, even rise up on the tips of their feet and flap their wings to give oomph to the crow. Their beautiful feathers become iridescent in sunlight. Most roosters care for the flock, fertilize eggs, and strut; but the occasional grouch will run at friend or foe intent on attack. An owner must decide to either send this type of rooster away or come into the pen using a five-gallon bucket as a shield.

Your rooster's crowing and hens' cackling will fill the air on early summer mornings. Chickens are easy to manage, give gifts in beautiful packages, and cackle a good morning to the world, rain or shine. Ah, the country life!



The Incredible Edible egg



- Eggshells contain as many as 17,000 tiny pores over their surface. Through them, the egg absorbs flavors and odors.
- Store eggs in a carton or covered container to help keep them fresh.
- Eggs age more in one day at room temperature than in one week in the refrigerator.
- Eggs look fresh when the white is thick with a cloudy glazed appearance.
- A hard-cooked egg will peel more easily if it is 10 days old before it is cooked.
- To tell if an egg is raw or hard-cooked, spin it! If the egg spins easily, it is hard-cooked; if it wobbles, it is raw.
- The egg yolk and white separate best when cold.
- Egg whites will beat to a better volume if allowed to stand at room temperature 20 to 30 minutes before whipping.
- The stringy piece of material in the egg is not an embryo but rather a special protein called chalazae, which acts as a shock absorber for the yolk so it doesn't break. The more prominent the chalazae, the fresher the egg.
- Eggs are one of the most nutritious and versatile of human foods.
- Egg protein is the standard to measure the quality of other food proteins. One egg contains about 6 to 7 grams of protein.
- The fat in the yolk is so finely emulsified it is easily digested, even by infants. The ratio of unsaturated to saturated fats is about 2 to 1.
- A mother hen turns over her egg about fifty times per day so the yolk won't stick to the sides of the shell.
- Egg protein is the standard to measure the quality of other food proteins. One egg contains about 6 to 7 grams of protein.

The brown eggs were laid in one day by 30 busy hens and the speckled eggs are from 2 turkeys. ✓

