



Considering Backyard Hens? Basic Chicken Care & Human Health Information

If you have no knowledge or experience in chicken care it is important that you do your research before applying for a permit. This is meant as a general overview and does not cover everything you need to know for basic chicken care and human health.

Proper care of chickens requires some physical adaptations to a typical backyard, a daily time commitment to caring for the hens 365 days a year, a lot of preparation and a great deal of expertise.

The challenges of keeping hens in urban settings:

1. Chicken feed must be purchased from a specialized supplier. Pet food stores are not known to carry the feed hens need.
2. To be comfortable, hens need shade for hot days, and a heat source for cold days.
3. Be sure to lock up the chickens at night to keep them safe from skunks, rats, raccoons and neighbourhood pets who will try to eat the hens and their feed.
4. Failing to provide clean water every day can lead to hen infections and illness.
5. Eggs are porous and can absorb invisible harmful bacteria if not handled properly.
6. Educate yourself on the different warning signs that indicate a hen is ill. Hens require vaccinations and health care from a qualified veterinarian.
7. It is not appropriate to compost chicken manure due to the high level of minerals (especially phosphorus) in the manure, which can stop the composting process in typical backyard composters. Develop a plan for how to dispose of your chicken manure.
8. All livestock, including chickens, can be carriers of diseases which can be transmitted to humans who are in close contact with them including children. It is important to learn how to handle and care for hens without accidentally exposing yourself to an animal disease such as Avian Influenza.
9. Hens can live to be 7-10 years old. An older hen needs to take a break from egg production periodically. Going out of production is termed molting, and occurs naturally, and is necessary for old hens to remain healthy.
10. Any area where animals live will become increasingly contaminated the longer animals are housed there. Plan to have "down time" when no poultry live in the yard, which will give you a chance to decontaminate the area, and break the life cycle of the bacteria and viruses.

Did you know?

- ❖ A hen excretes about 1 kilogram of manure every week.
- ❖ A hen can appear healthy, but can be laying eggs to the detriment of their own health if not receiving proper diet and care.
- ❖ Laying hens need feed that is especially high in protein and calcium. The high calcium level that a hen needs in her diet would be toxic to other animals such as a cat or dog.

Having urban hens can be a rewarding experience and a great source of pride. However, failing to do these daily chores can severely affect hen health, hen welfare, egg quality, and consequently, human health.



Infectious Diseases Associated with Live Poultry

A common concern is the transmission of Salmonella and Campylobacter bacteria from live poultry to humans. Live poultry are known to carry Salmonella and Campylobacter bacteria in their droppings and on their bodies even when they appear healthy and clean. The bacteria can get on coops, feed and water dishes, as well as plants and soil in the area where the birds live and roam. Bacteria can also get on the hands, shoes, and clothes of people who handle and care for the birds. People become infected with Salmonella and Campylobacter bacteria when they put their hands or equipment that has been in contact with live poultry in or around their mouth.

People at Higher Risk

Certain groups of people are at increased risk of infection. Children younger than 5 years of age have an increased risk of infection that can cause serious illness. This is due to their developing immune systems and frequent hand-to-mouth activities. Elderly individuals and people with weakened immune systems are also at increased risk.

Disease Prevention

Handwashing protects you from germs

- Always wash your hands with soap and water right after handling live poultry, eggs or anything in the environment where they live and roam
- Adults should supervise handwashing by young children
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available



Handle birds safely

- Children younger than 5 years of age, elderly individuals and people with weakened immune systems should avoid handling live poultry
- Do not snuggle or kiss the birds, touch your mouth or eat and drink around live poultry
- Do not let live poultry inside the house, especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served or stored
- Set aside a pair of shoes to wear while taking care of poultry and keep those shoes outside of the house
- Stay outdoors when cleaning any equipment or materials used for caring for live poultry

More Information?

Visit the Township of North Dumfries website for additional information and resources where you can learn more.

Do your research and educate yourself before deciding to apply for an urban hen's permit.

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