



Caring for your hens

**Congratulations on the purchase
of your new hens!**

**This guide will help you to get
started with your hens.**

So, now you have your hens and a coop... you're well on the way to waking up to a lovely fresh egg in the morning!

Your hens will not only provide you with eggs. They make great pets and their droppings are a great addition to your compost heap!

Setting up the Coop

Constructing your chicken house

Our chicken houses are supplied ready-assembled. The run is supplied in four parts which simply screws together.

Free range or enclosed?

If you have a big back garden your hens will love to roam around your garden during the day and then go back into their Coop at night. However, if your garden is not fully enclosed or if you or your neighbours have dogs, or if you have a problem with foxes, it is best to keep them in a run.

Locating the run

Hens love scratching at grass, they will eat the grass and scratch up worms and insects. Be warned though – hens will make short work of your lovely neat lawn and will scratch it into a bare patch of ground if you don't move their run around regularly! They can also be located on soil or woodchip.

Bedding

You will need to put something on the floor of your chicken house to absorb the poop and make it easier to clean out. You can use sawdust, wood chippings or shavings, shredded paper or straw.

They like to have a nice cosy nest box to lay their eggs in so line this with a little hay or straw, or just a nice thick layer of sawdust or shredded paper.

Drinker

An egg contains about 50% water so your hens will need constant access to fresh water or this will affect their laying. You can buy special drinkers that you won't have to fill up so often, or you can use an old container such as a pan or a bowl. Hens are not fussy!

Food container

Again, you can buy special food dispensers or you can use an old container. Hens like to scratch for their food so make sure the dish is sturdy, has high sides and the bowl isn't so big that they will stand in it.

It isn't a good idea to scatter their food on the ground because if they don't eat it it will attract vermin. Always be sure to cover any leftover food in the evening or take it inside.

Food

Layers pellets will provide your hens with a balanced diet. These are available from the Tippy Chicks stand at your local market, or can be obtained from farm supplies outlets such as Glanbia.

Chickens love and need greenery like grass. If your chicken has access to greens they will produce lovely eggs with less cholesterol and more Omega-3 fatty acids.

After you've mowed your lawn throw a pile of grass clippings into the run and watch the hens dive in!

They also love treats such as bread, leftover veg, rice and pasta. Try to avoid sugary treats because as with us humans, they can get a bit too fond of

them if they are given regularly! Remember that a balanced diet is best.

Fruit and veg can be given to them on a regular basis. They will eat uncooked peelings if they are hungry, but generally prefer cooked veg!

Your hens don't need extra treats but when you see their delight at getting fed a bit of leftover sweetcorn, melon seeds or potatoes, you'll soon be stealing extra treats from the kitchen for them!

If your chickens don't have access to grass and soil they will need extra grit in their diet. Chickens don't have teeth. They use grit in their gizzards to grind up food. There are two types of grit – hard grit (little bits of soil and stones) for digestion and calcium, which dissolves in the stomach and provides calcium for egg production. Crushed oystershell can be given too them if the egg shells look thin.

Hens will only eat as much layers pellets as they need, so don't worry about leaving out too much food for them.

Apple cider vinegar (unrefined) can be added to the drinking water to help to maintain the hen's immune system. For adult hens, this is added at the ratio of 20 mls per litre of water and given one week out of four.

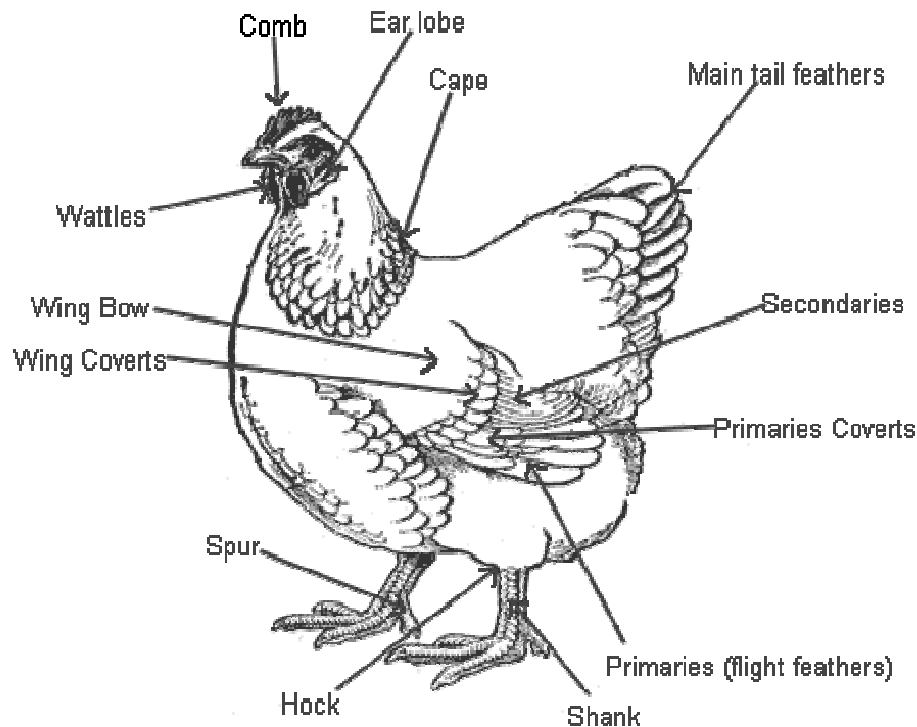
Most laying hens will consume about 120g of pellets per day and these contain all the necessary nutrients.

A crushed clove of garlic in their water is a natural way of keeping worms and mites away from your hens and oregano (dried or fresh) can be added to their food to build up their immunity and keep them in tip-top condition.

If you look after your hens and keep them clean you shouldn't have any problems with disease.

Keeping your chickens healthy

Finding your way around your hen



Healthy chickens

Healthy hens have the following qualities:

- ★ When fully grown the hen should have a nice firm comb
- ★ The comb will be bright red when the chicken is in lay.
- ★ The eyes should be beady and bright.
- ★ A healthy hen will be perky, lean and active.

- ★ Scales on the legs and feet should be smooth and not lifting.
- ★ When you pick your chicken up her body should be plump and firm, but with no flabbiness.
- ★ You can examine your chickens eyes and nose to check there are no discharges.
- ★ The vent (the hen's all-purpose exit point) should be moist and white, with no lumps, crustiness, bleeding etc.

How to Catch and Handle your Chickens

Depending on how used to human contact your chickens are, the easier or harder it will be to catch them. A little enticement with a handful of treats should get them close enough!

As a rule the best way is to quickly grab their feet from under them. Do NOT chase your chickens around grabbing at their tails or wings. This will only cause them panic which could be bad for their health or at the very least, affect egg production.

Sometimes your chicken may think that you are a cockerel and flatten themselves to the ground in anticipation of mating. This will actually make them easier to pick up!

Once you have your chicken by the legs try to get it into a position in which you can carry it whilst supporting its body. Use one hand to support it from underneath by putting your index finger between its legs and securing the legs with your thumb and forefinger.

With one hand under the chicken, it is relatively easy to keep the chicken quiet and do any health checks you need to. Handling your chicken and getting it used to human contact will help you in the long-run even if you aren't keen to pick it up simply to stroke.

Help! My hen is poorly!

Unfortunately, chickens are very good at hiding illnesses and it's often difficult to spot an illness until it's too late. If your hen is sitting in a corner, huddled up, it is likely that she is very sick. The

best thing to do is separate her from the other hens, keep her warm and hope for the best.

Please feel free to call us if you are worried about the health of your hen.

Keeping your chickens safe

Dogs

Some dogs are quite happy to live alongside hens, whereas others (particularly terrier- type breeds) will see them as sport. You know your own dog best and if after a few supervised introductions you feel that the dog won't live happily alongside the hens then it's best to make sure you keep the hens in their run at all times.

It is very important to make sure that your neighbours dogs can't get into your garden.

Foxes

Fox attacks during the day are rare, but after dusk they will come looking for their supper. It's important that you lock your hens in their coop as soon as they have gone to bed in the evening.

Daily and weekly routine

Morning

First thing in the morning, open the door to the chicken coop. Your hens will be pleased to see you with their breakfast.

Give them enough food for the day (about 120g per hen). Don't worry about giving them too many layers pellets – they won't overeat.

It's best to save treats till the afternoon or the evening. If you give your hens treats early in the morning they won't be as keen to eat their layers pellets.

Evening

As the sun sets your hens will put themselves to bed. When they've gone to bed make sure their doors are securely fastened.

Weekly

It's best to clean your hens out once a week.

Scrape out the droppings and old bedding and put it on your compost heap.

A solution of Dettol can be used to wash the house out.

Replace the bedding in the nest box and the sawdust in the main part of the house.

Move the house to a new area of grass. This will prevent one area of your lawn being over-used and any disease from building up in the area.

Good luck to you and your hens!

Tippy Chicks

Crohane, Killenaule, Thurles, County Tipperary

Tel: 086 8627306

Email: info@tippychicks.com

www.tippychicks.com