

# When is the Right Time to Cull a Chicken?



How do you know when it is the right time to cull a chicken from your flock. Culling a chicken is a hard decision for many modern homesteaders. We are able to be more flexible, in many cases, because the chickens we raise are often a cross between pets and livestock. Even so, there are situations when raising chickens, when we have to answer the question, is this the right time to cull a chicken? The following situations may occur on your homestead or in your flock and lead you to the point of decision making.

## **The Right Time to Cull a Chicken**

### **Egg Eating**

Egg eating in a production barn would almost surely be met with the decision to cull. After all is said and done, livestock is supposed to produce food. If the livestock is eating the produced food, it is counter productive to keeping it. Now I will tell you that I have never culled a chicken for behavior, egg eating or other. I try to work it out by gathering eggs more frequently or catching the culprit in the act.

If I catch the egg eater, quarantine in a crate for a couple of days with food and water of course, often stops the behavior. Also, adding free choice calcium to the coop. If my calcium feeder remains empty too many days, I can have a hen lay soft shelled eggs. These are easily broken by the egg eater, making it even more likely the chickens will try and eat the good eggs too.



## **Aggression**

Aggression can take the joy out of chicken keeping. If you have to continually watch your back while feeding and tending to the chicken's needs, it wears you down. Roosters commonly disrupt the care of the flock by over protecting the hens.

Try to train your roosters to look at you as the Flock Boss. They should move out of your way as you move about the coop or run. Sometimes keeping an aggressive rooster is just not possible. You may be ok with his antics but if you have small children, the danger is greatly increased and totally unacceptable.

Hens can be nasty at times too. In a flock without a rooster, one of the hens will often assume the roll of protector and behave like a rooster. Even with no spurs, being attacked by a chicken can be startling and painful. You may want to assess if it is the right time to cull a chicken.

## **Non-Laying Hen**

Older hens often slow in egg production until they cease to lay altogether. At some point the hen becomes a fancy, well fed, bug hunter for your yard. In our case, I am happy to let the older hens live out their days, enjoying life on the farm.

I think they add to the flock's character. But then again, I am crazy about my chickens. In some situations you are limited on the number of chickens you can keep. Having your aging flock take up the space that could be used for younger producing hens may not be the best idea. This may lead you to think about the right time to cull a chicken.





## **Is Having a Chronic Illness or Injuries the Right Time To Cull a Chicken?**

Even well kept backyard chickens can become ill. If she doesn't die from the illness, the hen may not lay again. Once again, you are keeping a pet chicken at this point. This is a situation I faced recently. We had a chicken that was partially paralyzed. I treated her for over two weeks, exercising her, holding her, making sure she could reach food and water.

Ginger tried to recover. She did really well and made progress. Then she took a giant step backwards. The light left her eyes. Her comb became pale and discolored. She was having trouble keeping her eyes open because she felt bad and was probably in pain. I had to make a difficult decision. Chickens are commonly attacked by predators, too. You may find your hen near death and suffering. Sometimes the right time to

cull a chicken decision is made for us, and we need to end the suffering. Each person has to make this after assessing the individual demands and drawbacks of keeping the hen alive.

## **Bad Genetics**

Some chickens are hatched weaker than the rest of the flock.

Bad genetic combinations can lead to conformation issues in the chicken's body, beak, legs, and feet, that keep it from living a normal chicken life. Some conditions, such as prolapsed vent occur and keep occurring. Hens that repeatedly suffer from reproductive tract troubles such as prolapse and egg binding may be suffering from an infection.

In small chicks, spraddle leg can often be corrected if discovered early enough. In cases where treatment of bracing the legs does not work, the chick may need to be culled. Cross beak or scissor beak can be trimmed but may eventually lead to the chicken not being able to eat enough food to stay alive.

- spraddle leg
- cross beak
- egg bound
- prolapsed vent

## **The chicken is a rooster**

Finally, one of the things we have little control over is ending up with a rooster when we ordered all pullets from the breeder or hatchery. There is no 100% guarantee on sexing day old chicks. When your community or city has a strict "No Rooster" policy, you must get rid of the rooster. Some places will try to re-home a healthy rooster, especially if it is a rare or popular breed. In many cases the rooster ends up as meat for the family.



Being able to make the ultimate decision when the right time to cull a chicken comes along is part of the responsibility of raising backyard chickens. Ending the suffering of your hen or using the other purpose for the surprise rooster is humane. Homesteaders and farmers have been carrying out this process for years. It won't be easy but the end of life decisions should be thought about before you start keeping chickens.

Making end of life decisions for our livestock and poultry is never easy. The subject is a sensitive one in today's modern homesteader world. If you have positive comments, encouraging words or courteous disagreement, I invite you to leave a comment in the comments section.

