

Should You Raise Chickens?



Should you raise chickens once you have a place of your own? If the homesteading journey has begun for your family, you may be ready to add livestock. One of the easiest and most common ways to begin raising animals is to begin with chickens. The initial expenses are moderate, and within a few months of deciding on should you raise chickens, you will receive that first farm fresh egg. Or maybe you are choosing chickens as a source for meat for the family.

Is chicken keeping the right homestead choice for your family?

All chicken breeds can provide both meat and eggs for your family. Traditionally, the hens were kept for egg production until the hen was older. A rooster or two may have been kept for fertilizing the eggs and to protect the flock from predators. Excess roosters were harvested for food when full grown. Both roosters and hens are excellent at providing insect control, and making good use of kitchen scraps. (read

here to find out which kitchen scraps are not good for chickens). In addition, keeping a rooster with your hens can provide a sustainable source of new chicks, if you allow the hen to brood some fertilized eggs. Fertilized eggs can also be placed in an [incubator](#).



Meat breeds such as the Cornish Cross, or Freedom Ranger are a short term involvement in chicken raising. Meat breeds gain weight very quickly. They reach market size in approximately 12 weeks. Because of their rapid weight gain, it is usually not recommended to keep these hens as egg producers or as pets.

Egg laying breeds such as the White Leghorn, (white egg), Australorp, (brown egg) Marans, (dark brown egg) and Ameraucana, (shades of blue eggs) are good choices. There are many heritage breeds of chickens that are also kept for both meat and egg production. Some breeds to consider are Brahmans,

Buckeyes, Sussex and Wyandotte. Many heritage breeds of chickens can be kept for both egg production and then used as meat.



First steps when considering should you raise chickens

Before going too far in the planning phase, make sure that the local zoning and neighborhood restrictions are in favor of raising poultry. Often, county zoning differs from nearby city ordinances and neighborhood covenants or restrictions can further regulate the keeping of chickens. Before spending money on a coop, chicken run and fencing, make sure you won't have to overcome these hurdles. The time and cost of fighting

local laws can mount quickly.

It's a good idea to check with adjoining property owners and neighbors before bringing home chickens. Even if chicken keeping is legal, it can be a headache if your neighbor is extremely opposed to chickens joining the neighborhood. If you find that your neighbor is actually in favor of the idea, sometimes a neighborhood co-op situation can be worked out. This has some benefits to it. The loss of privacy and solitude can be offset by having a neighbor that can take care of the flock if you go away on vacation. Sharing the costs of feed and maintaining the flock would be another benefit to co-owning a flock of chickens.



Where to Build the Coop?

Should you raise chickens also comes with the decision on how to house the hens. Some factors should be decided before shopping for a chicken coop. How many hens do you plan to keep? While chickens are not hard to keep, having more does

lead to more cleanup and more mouths to feed if you cannot free range them safely. A good number for eggs for a family is provided by 3 to 7 laying hens. This may even provide enough extra eggs for occasional gifts to family, co-workers and neighbors. Of course the size of the flock will need to be determined by the size of the family and how many eggs you are accustomed to eating.



A chicken coop should allow 3 to 4 square feet per chicken. If the chickens will need to stay in the coop for long periods of time you might consider upping the square foot per chicken to 7 or 8.

There are many styles of chicken coops available. [Choose a sturdy coop](#) to begin with and you will be glad you did. Often the less expensive models are easy for predators to break into, leading to a sad situation. Choosing a well made sturdy coop, surrounding it with a fenced chicken run will deter many predators. Using hardware cloth instead of chicken wire for the fencing, makes a sturdier more resistant pen. **For more on building a predator resistant chicken run, [read here.](#)**

If you have natural shade, that is a great place to set up the coop. Chickens are not very heat tolerant. Providing them with natural cooling shade will help them better deal with hot humid weather. Always provide plenty of cool water, too. If you don't have natural shade, provide some shade in the run using a tarp, or umbrella to provide a shady area.



In addition to providing a structure that is big enough for the chickens, the coop should have two doors. One for you to use when cleaning the coop, or tending to the chickens. The smaller pop door allows the chickens easy access to the coop if danger or weather is a threat. Egg nesting boxes, roost bars, strong durable door latches and good ventilation are also necessary in a good coop. Adding a fan for hot weather is a great addition.

Other coop styles are available for smaller flocks of 3 or 4 chickens. Some people choose to use a structure called a tractor. Tractors are often moved around using wheels on one end. This allows the chickens to free range safely and keeps

one area of ground from becoming overly scratched up.

Do you have time to take care of chickens?

This is an important question. Should you raise chickens may depend on how much time you have to spend on them. If you are rarely home to feed, water and check on them, I would say, no. If you are only gone for work and occasional vacations, then raising chickens can still work for you. The chickens will need someone to check on them and make sure they have food and water and some minor cleanup while you are away.

Deciding on the question of should you raise chickens can be the start of a healthy lifestyle and diet change for you and your family. Raising fresh healthy chickens and collecting backyard fresh eggs is a great start to eating fresh food. The move towards [backyard chicken keeping](#) can be a rewarding choice. Asking yourself the question, Should you raise chickens is a great place to start.



Should You Raise Chickens?



What questions should you ask before you start raising chickens?
What kind of housing do they need?



What breeds are good?
Should we raise for meat or eggs?
How much time is needed?
Is it even legal?

