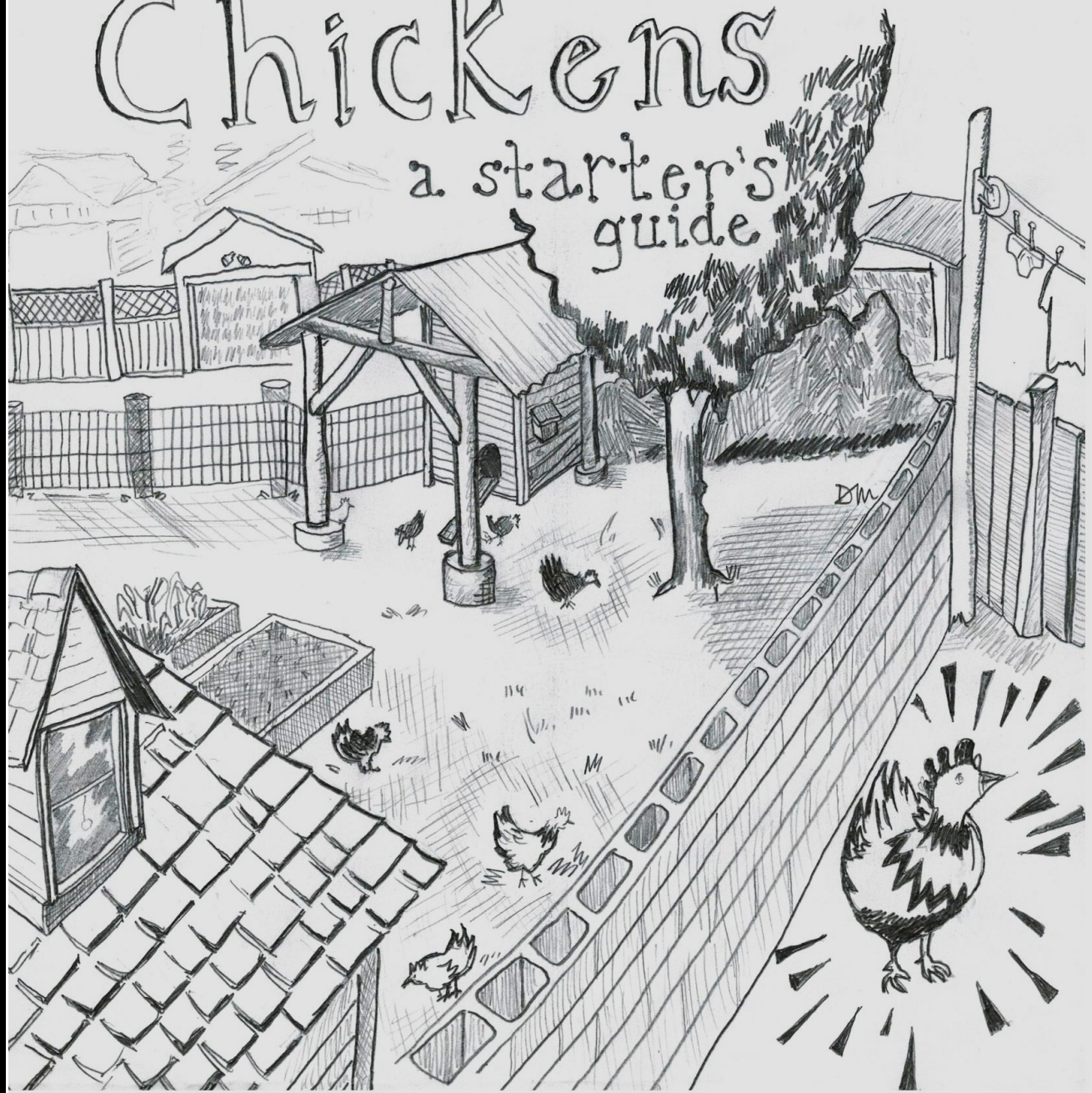


BACKYARD Chickens

a starter's
guide



Urban Chicken Guide

Duncan Martin

www.DailyEggs.com – Locally made chicken coop kits
and custom work 604-329-3863



The Gist of the Vancouver Chicken Bylaw:

- Each house may keep up to 4 hens (no roosters) for egg-laying purposes.
- No chicks – chicks can turn out to be roosters, so get 4-6 month-old hens (called pullets)
- The city asks that people fill in a free online registry for backyard chickens.
- Chickens must have full protection from pests and predators.
- Each hen must have 4 square feet of coop space and 10 square feet of “run.” There must also be roosting space for hens to sleep
- Chicken enclosures must be at least 3 feet from the property line and 10 feet from windows and doors.
- Slaughtering chickens in Vancouver is not allowed

Other Municipalities: (see <http://urbanchickens.pbworks.com/North-American-Chicken-Laws> to search for your city) OR just go on your city's bylaw page and read their animal control bylaw

Burnaby – There is nothing in the animal control bylaw prohibiting chickens, however there is vague language in the zoning bylaw that keeps them from most areas of the city

North Vancouver District – In Process!

North Vancouver Township – YES!

West Vancouver – They were outlawed in 2008, but a 12-year-old boy is bringing them back:

<http://www.northshoreoutlook.com/news/175620681.html>

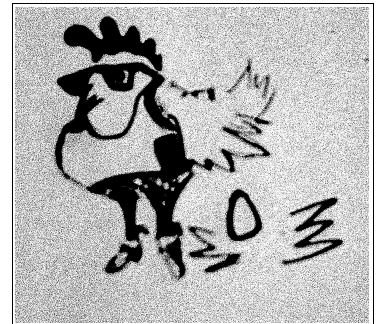
Richmond – Not unless you have ½ acre or more

Surrey – Not unless you have an acre or more

Port Coquitlam – Yes- Not allowed to be “at large”

Delta – Only on “large residential lots”

Maple Ridge – Not in residentially-zoned areas. There is movement afoot to change this.



So what are we talking, an hour a day for just a few eggs?

No. Contrary to the city's literature, expect to spend 2-10 minutes per day tending to your hens. This may just involve a “Hello,” opening a door, checking the food and water, and collecting eggs, and a “thank you.” Once every couple of weeks, you will want to do a quick clean. Depending on your bedding and composting methods, this may just take a couple of minutes.

What do chickens eat?

Chicken feed – This is often in the form of nutrient-balanced mash or mash pellets. This is \$10-20 per 20 kg bag depending on whether you get conventional or organic.

Laying hens typically eat mash (or mash pellets) with 16% protein. This is the most common and productive formula. If you have chicks, make sure to get chick feed, which is lower in calcium. Feed should always stay dry or it will get moldy.



Chickens self-regulate how much they eat, so keep a constant supply of feed and they will decide when they've had enough. Chicken feeders are available at feed stores or can be made by hand.

Water – Keep it clean, unfrozen, and always available. I recommend 2 tablespoons of unpasteurized apple cider vinegar per gallon of water to ward off parasites and to help with digestion. Heated waterers are available.

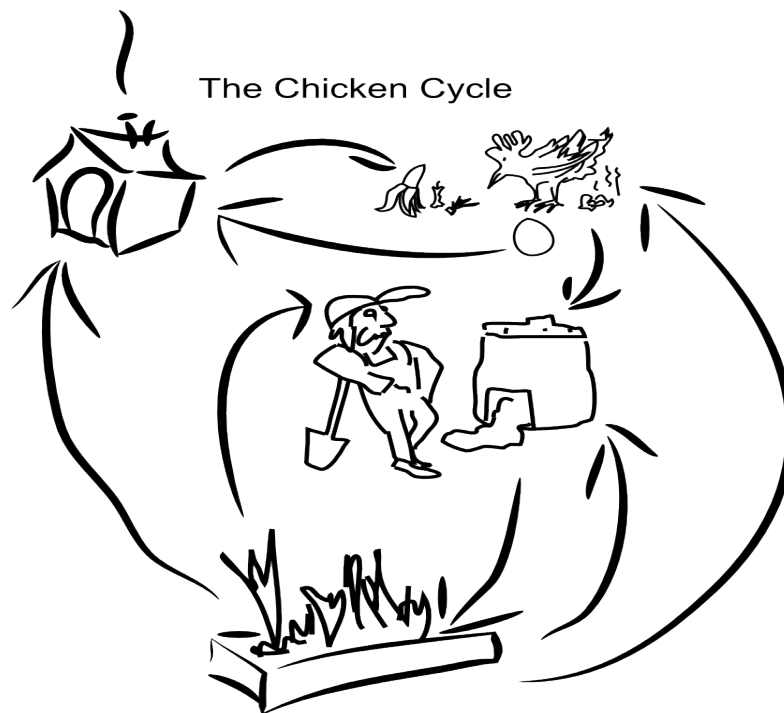
Chicken scratch – This is another name for whole grains and legumes that have been dried and cracked. Chickens love to peck at scratch if you scatter a handful of it. It's not necessary, but your chickens will appreciate it and it's a good way to summon them. You can sprout most chicken scratch by wetting it and keeping it on a tray for a few days. Chickens love the small sweet sprouts.

Table scraps – Chickens will typically pick and choose what they want to eat, and they leave the rest. Don't worry too much about what is and isn't good to feed them. You'll figure it out pretty quickly. Just avoid old raw meat, coffee grounds, and be careful of teabags with staples in them. The internet has plenty of extensive DOs and DONTs lists if you want to be really careful.

Weeds, slugs, bugs – Anything you pull out of the garden can go right into the coop. Again, the chickens will decide what they like. The rest will become bedding or just rot away.

Oyster shell, crushed eggshell – These provide added calcium and are rarely needed if you are providing fortified feed, but if your eggs' shells are looking weak, it can't hurt to give the hens a supplement. If you use eggshells, let them dry out or bake them and then crush them.

Grit – Hens have a gizzard instead of teeth. As they eat small stones, chickens collect them in the gizzard, which grinds their food. After a while the stones wear down and pass through. As long as there is some coarse gravel around, chickens will get enough grit. --Or find it cheap at any feed store.



FAQ:

Will hens lay eggs without a rooster?

Like mammals, female birds produce eggs whether or not a male mates with them. The difference, of course, is that their eggs are much bigger and their menstrual cycle has been shortened to almost-daily through selective breeding.

How often do chickens lay eggs?

A healthy productive hen will lay about 5-6 eggs per week. This is sometimes interrupted by various natural pauses such as broodiness (a hormonal mothering instinct that can set in for a few weeks), molting (renewing feathers), or just being under the weather. Winter production is bolstered by having a light in order to extend the daylight. Some breeds lay a few more eggs than others, so don't hold them to any expectations.

How long do hens lay?

Hens will lay eggs from about 6 months to 5 years of age. This is approximate and can vary from bird to bird. As they get older, hens will produce fewer – but larger – eggs.

Where can I buy laying hens?

First, join VillageVancouver.ca and see postings from local members on chickens for sale, feed runs, advice, etc. Sometimes somebody is looking to reduce their flock by a few hens.

Other options: Believe it or not, a search on Craigslist brings up many chickens for sale by farmers in the Fraser Valley. And a fun weekend outing is Fraser Valley Auctions (all kinds of farm animals) at 21801-56th Ave. 56 Ave. Langley, BC V2Y 2M9.

Do some research on the breed, their laying capacity, weather hardiness, temperament, etc. McMurray Hatchery's website has a fairly comprehensive online guide to chickens that is worth a look.

What do I do if I have to go away for a few days?

It is important to make sure your hens have food and clean water, and you'll generally want to collect eggs daily. This makes for a perfect neighborly agreement. They tend the hens and get fresh eggs. If you are away for a long period, you can disassemble the coop (the Vancooper only requires 30 minutes of assembly) and move it to a friend's backyard.

I sometimes leave my hens for 3 days with food and water and they're perfectly happy.

What if my chicken gets sick?

This is a question all pet owners must deal with from time to time. There are vets, such as the Night Owl Animal Hospital, that can treat chickens. This will almost always be more expensive than replacing the hen, but sometimes antibiotics for the entire flock are necessary in the case of disease. Many afflictions can be diagnosed and treated with a little research. Books such as City Chicks and The Chicken Health Handbook are helpful, as well as this poop-diagnosis site:

<http://chat.allotment.org.uk/index.php?topic=17568.0>.

Sometimes it's as simple as giving your flock a reduced dose of dog/cat worm medicine available at pet stores or feed stores.

As for immediate measures, separate the sick hen from the flock as soon as possible, then try to diagnose the problem (see resources). A small amount of sugar in her water will encourage her to drink. If basic troubleshooting is not enough, contact a veterinarian. Make sure that she still has access to water and food if secluded.

Cremation is offered through the city's animal control branch (3-1-1). Double-bag the chicken and freeze it if disposal is not possible immediately.

End of Life

If you decide it's time to end your chicken's life, consider that the bylaw prohibits backyard slaughter. Perhaps you have a cousin outside of the city who can host this. Or call Trev (see resources).

Alternatively, you can have your hen put down by the vet, but it will not be edible (and it costs about \$40). Don't name your hens if you think you might kill them eventually -- OR do give them names from the Joy of Cooking.

Feed and Supply Stores and Chicken Resources:

Feed:

The Homesteader's Emporium:

649 E. Hastings St. at Heatley St. in Vancouver. Rick is a great local source for all things chicken (including my coops!) as well as a plethora of other

Marks Pet Stop :

2nd and Commercial Drive. Vancouver, BC V5N 4A6, (604) 255-4844. Mark sells organic layer mash

Kenneth Cao:

"Hi, I sell chicken feed and bales, if you're interested please give me a call at 604 700 5804"
Organic layer mash 21\$

Straw bales 16\$ for 1 and 4 for 14\$ each
5\$ for Delivery if you're within Vancouver.

Roddick Feed & Farm Supply

4119 - 40th Street Delta, BC V4K 3N2 Tel: 604-946-2771

Otter Coop (call to see if they have organic in stock)

3600 248 Street, Aldergrove-(604) 856-7011

16780 104 Avenue, Surrey-(604) 582-2517

12343 Harris Road. Pitt Meadows. 604- 465-5651

6420 Ladner Trunk Rd, Ladner-(604) 940-1322

Tisol

They carry chicken feed and are everywhere, but they don't carry organic feed.

Other Resources:

City of Vancouver Animal Control: 3-1-1

Cremation (~\$30)

Night Owl Bird Hospital (Euthanasia services and medical care)

1956 West Broadway Vancouver, BC, V6J 1Z2

(604) 734-5100

Fraser Valley Poultry Fanciers Association (source of young heritage chickens)

<http://www.fvpfa.org/>

Trev: There is a man in Langley named Trev who provides a slaughtering service (and you can keep the meat) for \$2 per bird with a minimum of \$10 per visit. 604-808-2161.

Duncan Martin:

I sell pre-fab and custom coops: 604-329-3863.

Building a coop:

1. Helpful hints:

- 2x3 lumber is cheaper than 2x4s and it takes up less space when building coop walls. By shaving down one corner, you can turn a 2x3 into a perch and hang it using steel joist hangers (Simpson Strong-tie)
- Lumber stores often have free tarps that are used to cover pallets. These can come in very handy
- If making swinging doors or installing an automatic door, keep openings off the ground a few inches so they don't get clogged with bedding that the chickens kick up.
- Use treated deck screws. They have a ceramic coating that stands up to moisture as well as



the acids in cedar and the chemicals in treated wood.

– Chicken tractors: chicken tractors are a great way to get chickens out and about during the day. They are small mobile coops that are lightweight or on wheels. The challenge with them is that they are inherently more susceptible to pests and predators. Also, a small yard can turn brown and muddy quickly if you graze chickens too heavily. I prefer to bring weeds and bugs to them so they only ruin one part of the yard.

2. Follow the bylaw whenever possible. The city has visited people's coops, so it doesn't hurt to be compliant.
3. Consider your schedule and likely pattern of maintenance. Can the kids reach it if they need to clean it? Will you be letting them out in the morning and in the evening, or giving them full reign over the whole pen and house at all times? Where will you store your feed? Is there a compost nearby?
4. Use a material and a design that considers Metro Vancouver's wet weather. Large roof overhangs, cedar wood, protective stain, creative use of tarps....
5. Use 1/2" hardware cloth (galvanized wire mesh), **not chicken wire**, on all outdoor enclosures. Chicken wire is weak and has rat-sized openings. It is only good for keeping *chickens in*. Bury some hardware cloth into the ground to prevent burrowing pests and predators – Or build a coop that sits atop a raised garden bed. Make two beds and move it back and forth year-to-year. The wood on the garden bed offers good ground protection.
6. Make it **easy to clean**. This means access and materials. Bedding (hay, straw etc.) on linoleum makes for quick cleaning. The chickens **must have a perch** – something simulating a tree branch that they can all stand on to sleep. You will find concentrated poop underneath. Consider a removable board or strips of cardboard that you can periodically just throw in the compost.
7. At least four chickens can share one nest box. This just needs to be about 12"x12" and in a corner of the coop. It should be off the ground and somewhat dark if possible.
8. Raccoons are smart; don't underestimate their dexterity – make sure that your doors have latches or locks that a raccoon can't open. **Rats will eat chicken feed if they can reach it.** Clean up any spills when filling a feeder and keep your feed in a rat-proof container like a metal trash can.
9. Ventilation and heat – make vents in the coop that allow air flow without uncomfortable cross-drafts. Humidity is worse than cold, so don't seal them in the coop just because it's -10 outside. Fire-safe heaters may include specially-made products, seed tray heaters, or a lightbulb in an overturned pot. Heat is rarely a concern in Vancouver. I use milk jugs filled with hot water and bring them out at night – It's cordless! If you use hot water to heat the coop on an especially cold night, make sure it's in a closed container to avoid moisture issues.
10. Light – Chickens lay best with about 14-16 hours of light per day, so buy a cheap light timer and stick a bulb or Christmas lights in the coop for the winter months. This also provides some

heat, although metro Vancouver rarely gets cold enough to have to worry about frozen chickens.

11. Food and water should be outside the coop. If temperatures fall, make sure chickens still have liquid water or an ample supply of snow to eat. Heated waterers are available at feed stores.
12. A dust bath is helpful for dealing with mites. Chickens enjoy a sandy area (you may include some diatomaceous earth) where they can roll around. The small particles slice the skeletons of the various parasites that can become a problem.
13. Bedding – There are various options for bedding and ground cover.
In the coop: leaves, straw, hay, cardboard, wood shavings (not cedar), even newspaper
In the run: leaves, straw (cut short if possible), gravel, sand, hay, *dry* grass clippings
Carbon-based materials turn into great compost
Hay has grains, which chickens love, but can also cause weeds in the compost and it gets moldy if not stored dry.

Now, go forth and take the leap. Treat the coop like an outhouse (it is, in a way) and put up your favourite laminated comics. Here is a starter, graciously borrowed from Gary Larsen:

