

Backyard Poultry - A Guide to keeping a few hens at home...

Keeping a few hens in the back garden to provide year round eggs is becoming more and more popular. For this reason we've put together this very basic information as a guide to those starting out.

There are no laws preventing you keeping hens, providing they are looked after properly and their welfare is taken seriously. However, it is advisable to check your property deeds or consult your landlord to make sure there are no covenants preventing the keeping of 'livestock'.

It would be advisable to contact the Planning Section Department (01824) 706727 or planning@denbighshire.gov.uk should you be thinking of keeping hens. The informal keeping of hens at a residential property for personal use may not require planning permission. However, more intensive keeping and/or commercial activity could result in a change of use should the residential character of the property alter significantly. Any structures which are required to keep the hens may also require planning permission whether they are in your garden or elsewhere.

You also need to consider whether you can give your hens 365 days a year care - and can you make adequate arrangements for when you're on holiday etc?

How many are you are going to keep?

This will probably depend on how many eggs you want. As a rule of thumb a hen can lay about 250 eggs per year. This will vary depending on the breed of the hens as well as their health and how well they're fed.

Do I need to register my 'flock'?

If you are considering keeping two or three hens to provide a year round supply of fresh eggs then there are no requirements to register with anyone. However, we would appreciate it if you voluntarily registered with us as this will help in the event of a disease outbreak. Please contact us to register your poultry. There is no cost involved and you will not be contacted.

If you keep 50 or more birds

You must, by law, register with the GB Poultry Register, administrated by [Defra](#) if you own, or are responsible for, poultry premises with 50 or more birds. This requirement also applies even if the premise is only stocked with 50 or more birds for part of the year. At present, premises with fewer than 50 birds are not required to register, but Defra encourage keepers to do so voluntarily.

Where can I keep them?

A small 4 foot by 3 foot hen house or shelter would accommodate a maximum of 12 hens (i.e. 1 square foot per bird). Remember bigger breeds will need more space. You should provide some outdoor space for your hens which, if you like your garden, its best fenced off. This is because hens love to scratch about to find seeds, insects, slugs and the like. Unfortunately they also like to eat anything green and, in doing so, they'll uproot small plants and create dust baths. You also need to keep your hens secure from foxes and cats. Remember - there are foxes in town as well as in the country.

What can I feed my hens?

Commercially produced poultry feed is readily available from a number of outlets, such as agricultural merchants, pet shops, some garden centres as well as larger feed producers and wholesalers.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Feeding catering waste to any food producing animals or birds has been illegal since 2001. Catering waste is defined in law as all waste food, whether raw or cooked, including used cooking oils, which arise in premises such as household kitchens, restaurants, fish & chips / pizza / kebab shops, takeaway shops, canteens and cafes, vegetarian kitchens and restaurants.

Denbighshire County Council, County Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin.
LL15 1YN.
Phone number: (01824) 706086 / 706189 Fax: (01824) 706051
Email: animalhealth@denbighshire.gov.uk



Cleanliness

Food and water left out for poultry may attract vermin such as rats and mice. Chicken houses may also provide shelter for rats and mice.

To prevent this happening, make it a part of your regular routine to clean the shelters, remove uneaten food and, if possible, move the shelter / run to a fresh location.

In the summer poorly kept poultry may result in unpleasant odours which can attract flies. These can become a nuisance to you and your neighbours which could result in a visit from a council Environmental Health Officer if a complaint is received.

Noise issues

Hens are generally fairly quiet, however cockerels are anything but!

If you do decide to keep a cockerel you run the risk of creating a noise nuisance which may result in a visit from the Council's noise officers if a complaint is received!

Remember - a cockerel is **not required** for your hens to lay eggs.

Contact the Pollution Section on (01824) 706083 / 706080 or envhealth@denbighshire.gov.uk to discuss noise and nuisance issues.

What are you going to do with any excess eggs?

Should you decide to sell your eggs to friends, family, over the gate or at a market stall then there are some things you need to know.

It is a legal requirement to register as a food business with our Food and Safety Team in Environmental Health.

To register please contact the Food and Safety Team on **01824 706305** or envhealth@denbighshire.gov.uk
Bear in mind that if you are running a business, you may also require planning permission for a change of use of your property.

Welfare of your poultry

Under The Animal Welfare Act 2006 it is against the law to be cruel to an animal (including birds) and you must ensure that their welfare needs are met.

These include the need:

- for a suitable environment (place to live)
- for a suitable diet
- to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- to be housed with, or apart from, other animals or birds (as applicable)
- to be protected from pain, injury, suffering, distress and disease.

The Welsh Assembly and Defra produce welfare codes for poultry (these have legal status and must be adhered to). The following booklets can be downloaded from their website:-

- [Welfare of laying hens \(www.wales.gov.uk\)](http://www.wales.gov.uk)
- [Meat chickens and breeding chickens \(www.defra.gov.uk\)](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

Clearly, these booklets are aimed at businesses that keep poultry on a large commercial basis. However, they contain useful information for smallholders too.

Consider diseases

Poultry are susceptible to many diseases and need regular checks. One such disease is avian influenza (Bird Flu) which is a highly contagious viral disease affecting the respiratory, digestive and/or nervous system of many species of birds.

It is a *notifiable disease* and suspect cases MUST be notified to the Local Authority (01824) 706086/706189 or Animal Health in Caernarfon (01286) 674144.