



What the Cluck!

RAISE SOME CHICKENS

Backyard chickens are fun pets that provide fresh eggs, eat pests and recycle food waste. Raising chickens in the city is a cinch. Here's how.

BY DEBORAH HUSO

Nicki Trench loves her backyard chickens

because of the fresh eggs they provide, but also because they're fun. "There is such a difference between eating a freshly laid egg and a storebought egg," she says. "Fresh eggs taste better." Author of *Creating Your Backyard Farm*, Trench loves to watch her Buff Orpington chickens running and wobbling from one end of her garden to the other searching for food or jumping in the air to chase a fly. "They make me smile each day," she says. "Chickens are definitely great mood enhancers."

Tom Potisk has been raising chickens in his Milwaukee backyard since 1995. "I've always enjoyed natural and organic food," he says. "Fresh eggs have nutrients, such as omega-3s, from the chickens eating grass and bugs." For Potisk, the author of *Whole Health Healing*, raising Araucana chickens is a family affair. His three children, ages 10, 12 and 14, help care for the chickens and collect their eggs. "Araucanas are non-aggressive and easy to work with," he says.

If you've been dreaming of fresh eggs but think you can't have your own chickens because you live in the city or suburbs, think again. Less than a century ago, when more people raised their own food, keeping a few chickens in the yard was common in cities,

and plenty of city ordinances still allow the practice. Raising chickens ensures you know where your eggs come from, and collecting eggs fulfills an instinct to provide our own food, Trench says. "It beats going to the supermarket any day," she says.

Chickens also make great garden and recycling assistants. They provide fertilizer, eat pests, and help dig over your vegetable patch at the end of the season. Chickens eat biodegradable kitchen garbage like rusted lettuce, tomato tops and corn husks. Trench says her chickens love pasta and rice. "You'll get to know their favorite items," she says. "You'll find your garbage will be less than half the size once you start keeping chickens."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Many heritage breeds have natural foraging abilities, keeping yards pest-free. Choose docile breeds if you have or live near children (see "Pick Up Chicks" on page 72). Chickens make amusing pets. Nicki Trench raises fluffy Buff Orpington hens.



BUILD YOUR BROOD

Hobbyists, foodies and families across the country are raising chickens in their city, suburban and farmhouse backyards. With some basic research, you can jump on the chicken bandwagon.

Research breeds. Some breeds are better equipped to lay eggs, while others are raised for meat. Different breeds have different laying schedules. For example, most heritage breeds lay more eggs in spring and summer, whereas hybrids (a combination of two or more breeds) can lay year-round. You don't need a rooster unless you want to hatch chicks.

Consider your surroundings. Choose less aggressive breeds if you have children. Consider a less-vocal breed if you have nearby neighbors. See "Pick Up Chicks" below for a quick breed guide, or visit the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (albc-usa.org) for extensive breed information. Our sister publication *Grit* magazine offers a "Pickin' Chicken" iPhone app: grit.com/feather-brained/pickin-chicken.

Talk to other chicken keepers in your area. They can offer tips to keep your chickens safe from foxes, hawks, raccoons and other predators. See "Join Our Coop" at right for ways to connect.

Prepare a coop. Get instructions to build your own coop, or buy a premade one: backyardchickens.com; diychickencoops.com.

Order your chicks! Many hatcheries will ship chicks to your post office, but it's best to choose a local hatchery. To find a hatchery near you: cacklehatchery.com, healthychicksandmore.com or motherearthnews.com/Find-Chickens-Poultry-Hatchery.aspx.

Keep it clean. "There are very few risks of you or your family catching any diseases from a chicken," Trench says. Clean your coop once a week wearing a dust mask, and scoop out droppings each morning with a small shovel, wearing rubber gloves (composted droppings make for a great garden soil amendment).

CHECK THE LAWS

Before purchasing chickens, check your city's laws with your local zoning office. If you rent, also check with your landlord. Here are a few issues to consider:

- Can I raise chickens where I'm located?
- How many chickens can I have? Some cities limit the number of chickens you can own depending on the size of your yard, and most cities won't let you keep roosters.
- Is there a certain place the coop should be located?
- How much space will the chickens need?
- Will I be able to use all of the chicken manure and spent bedding in my yard or garden? If not, where will I be able to donate/dispose of it?



Join Our Coop

Last year, *Natural Home's* sister publications *Mother Earth News* and *Grit* launched the Community Chickens website, where you can find chicken-raising information, blogs, forums, expert advice, photos, resource listings and more: communitychickens.com. For a city-by-city list of regulations for keeping chickens, visit motherearthnews.com/eggs/city-chicken-regulations.aspx.

Kippen House coops are custom-designed, handmade and feature "living roof" gardens. They're available in the Seattle area: kippenhouse.com. Learn to make your own coop at diychickencoops.com.

Pick Up Chicks

Heritage breeds offer natural foraging abilities, increased longevity, self-sufficiency and disease-resistance.

CHANTECLER

Attributes: Lays 120 to 180 large brown eggs a year; calm, gentle and personable; developed to withstand harsh winter climates
Appearance: White or partridge colored with yellow flesh and legs; almost no wattle
History: The only breed ever developed in Canada
Status: Critical



DOMINIQUE

Attributes: Lays 230 to 275 medium brown eggs a year; easy keeping nature; natural foraging abilities
Appearance: Medium-sized with black and white barred coloring; tightly arranged plumage
History: The first chicken breed developed in the United States
Status: Watch



JAVA

Attributes: Lays up to 150 dark brown eggs a year; calm, sociable, seldom aggressive; great meat chicken
Appearance: Three varieties: black, mottled and white; known for its rectangular body and long, sloping back
History: Considered the second-oldest breed of chicken developed in the United States
Status: Threatened



RHODE ISLAND RED

Attributes: Lays 200 to 300 brown eggs a year; docile and friendly; known for vigor and ability to produce eggs under marginal conditions; excellent meat chicken
Appearance: Rich, deep-red distinctive plumage
History: Named the Rhode Island official state bird in 1954
Status: Recovering



—Courtesy American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, albc-usa.org



Healthier Eggs, It's True!

Testing by *Mother Earth News* in 2007 and 2008 determined that, compared with the USDA's nutrient data for commercial eggs, eggs from pasture-raised hens contain:

- ½ less cholesterol
- ¼ less saturated fat
- ⅔ more vitamin A
- 2 times more omega-3 fatty acids
- 3 times more vitamin E
- 7 times more beta-carotene
- 4 to 6 times as much vitamin D

Read more: motherearthnews.com/eggs.aspx