

About the Consultant

Jennifer Murtoff provides compassionate, homespun consulting and emergency care for backyard chickens. A farmer's granddaughter, Jennifer grew up tending her own fowl in south central Pennsylvania. Her flock included chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, quail, peafowl, pigeons, and golden pheasants. She offers information and resources on chicken care from chick to adult, and, while she is not a veterinarian, can provide emergency advice, troubleshooting, and vet referrals. Jennifer has taught and attended training seminars on backyard chickens and assists families with their own flocks.

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Chicken-Keeping Overview

1. Introduction
2. Reasons for raising chickens
3. Legality
4. Caring for chicks

5. Caring for adult chickens

6. Egg laying

7. Risks

a. Predators

b. Vermin

c. Disease

8. Weather (hot and cold)

9. Chicken ambassador program

Chicago Chicken Enthusiasts' Recommended Practices For healthy chickens and good relations with neighbors & city officials

The [Chicago Chicken Enthusiasts](#) (CCE) encourage learning and practicing basic standards for backyard chicken care, and to preserve the opportunity for everyone to keep chickens in Chicago and many surrounding suburbs that allow them.

This is not legal advice nor full instructions for keeping chickens. CCE urges chicken keepers to take a class or self-educate to prepare for responsible chicken keeping!

Prepare Before Getting Chickens

LEARN and do your homework.

- Maintaining a flock well requires time, attention, and resources – DO NOT ENTER INTO CHICKEN KEEPING LIGHTLY!
- Take a class, read a book, and/or find a mentor before starting your own flock. [The Chicago Chicken Enthusiasts \(CCE\) website](#) and [Google Group](#) link to excellent local resources and announcements of classes and learning events.
- Interact with the CCE community via the [Google Group](#) for recommendations and support.
- Attend the annual [Windy City Coop Tour](#) for support and advice.
- Review the laws that apply in your community. In Chicago, for example, home slaughtering of animals is not allowed but “live poultry” businesses may provide this service for a minimal fee.
- Plan for end of life. Hens can live for many years, but they lay eggs frequently for only the first few years of their lives. Have a plan for legal, humane slaughter or prepare to keep non-laying hens as pets. *Expecting to find a home for “retired” hens is not a sustainable solution.*
- Chickens are social animals. Plan to keep AT LEAST TWO chickens, and no more than are appropriate for the space you can provide.

TALK to your neighbors.

- Explain that you are getting chickens and how/where you plan to house them in your yard.
- Let your neighbors know that you will take proper care of your chickens in a way that respects their privacy and right to enjoyment of their property.
- Be ready to answer questions and address concerns.

PLAN and SET UP a good, comprehensive system BEFORE your chickens arrive.

- Consider details of daily and seasonal care and be ready to manage them well.
- Prepare a brooder if you are starting with chicks.
- Build or buy a secure coop and run with adequate room for all of your chickens.
- Set up a composting system for coop waste.
- **Keep the coop clean and odor-free. If your coop or run stinks it is unhealthy for your chickens and a nuisance to your neighbors.**

(Recommended Practices continued on reverse)

Keep Your Chickens Healthy

Provide secure, spacious, and sanitary HOUSING.

- They need a dry indoor space to roost at night (the coop) and an enclosed outdoor area (the run) for daytime use and access to fresh air and sunshine.
- The coop must be big enough for all of your chickens to enter, stand, and move around comfortably. It must have roosting bars for them to perch and sleep on.
- Ventilate the coop to allow fresh air in and hot air and moisture out ***all year round***.
- A run must be big enough for all of your chickens to move about, stretch, scratch, dust bathe, and engage in other normal chicken behaviors. It must have shade in summer.
- Both the coop and run must close securely to protect chickens from predators and pests.
- Supplemental heat sources for winter are not needed and may be a fire hazard. [Cold-hardy breeds](#) are best for Chicago and do well in our winters.

Provide access to clean, fluid WATER all day, every day. Plan for how you will do this in the winter when water can quickly freeze.

Provide appropriate and adequate FOOD daily.

- Feed mixes are available for the specific nutritional needs of chicks and laying hens. See the Feed and Supplies page on the [CCE website](#) for suggestions on where to buy chicken feed.
- Kitchen scraps alone do not provide the right amount and balance of nutrients.
- If possible, let your chickens ***supplement*** their diets, exercise, and get stimulation by foraging their own snacks from backyard soil and plants.

Monitor and INTERACT WITH YOUR CHICKENS daily.

- Look for changes in behavior and physical well-being.
- Be careful about taking a new chicken into your established flock. It introduces stress, can lead to injuries, and can bring parasites or diseases.
- If you have questions or doubts ask your mentor, [consult an expert](#), or request guidance on the [Chicago Chicken Enthusiasts Google Group](#).
- ***If your chickens are injuring each other, they likely need more room.*** Address the inadequacies in your coop/run or reduce the number of chickens.

Be a Good Neighbor

RESPECT concerns and laws about sanitation, noise, and humane treatment of animals.

For more information, search your municipal code ([Chicago Municipal code](#)).

- Keep your chickens in your yard. Do not let them roam in unfenced areas.
- Prevent rodents and other animals from getting into the coop or stored feed.
- Roosters make a lot of noise, and not just when the sun comes up! They are the source of hundreds of complaint calls in Chicago each year and are not needed for hens to produce eggs. **CCE recommends not keeping roosters in the city unless you are prepared to manage their crowing.**
- Share the wealth! Offer extra eggs or fertilizer to your neighbors while checking in about concerns or issues, and address them proactively.

Chicago Chicken Enthusiasts'

Responses to Common Concerns About Backyard Chickens

Sanitation and Odors

- The amount of chicken manure produced by six hens is roughly equivalent to the dog droppings produced by a medium-large dog.
- Responsible chicken owners keep their coops and runs clean and prevent smells becoming a nuisance, just like responsible dog or cat owners.
- Unlike dog or cat poop, chicken manure can be easily composted into garden fertilizer instead of ending up in landfills.

Noise

- On average, hens are far quieter than most dogs, parrots, or macaws. They generally make a soft chuckle or cluck. Occasionally, when they are showing off an egg they've just laid, or if there is a predator nearby, their clucking is slightly louder.
- Normal noises are not audible past 25 feet, the loudest noises at about 50 feet.
- Roosters can be loud – for this reason, some cities that allow chickens prohibit roosters. Chicago has a law prohibiting excessive animal noise. See the Chicago Municipal Code, 7-12-100.

Pests and Predators

- Chickens eat insects of all types, as well as small rodents. In secure yards where chickens are allowed some time to “free range,” the chickens will search out and eat insects such as ticks, fleas, millipedes, earwigs, grubs, beetles, spiders, moths, and worms. Chickens have also been known to eat mice and roaches.
- Chickens also eat many plants and seeds, and play a valuable role by eating excess or unwanted “weeds” and food scraps, “converting” them into fresh eggs and manure for compost. They will turn over and dig surface soil, tilling up garden beds and fertilizing in the process.
- While rats may be attracted to chicken feed, they are opportunists. They will scavenge food from the most convenient place: an open trash container or Dumpster, discards dropped by people, food placed outside for cats and dogs, and wild bird and squirrel feeders. Responsible chicken owners store feed in secure containers and do not leave excess food around for rats to eat.
- Ken Koelkebeck, PhD, UIUC Extension Poultry Specialist said that rats and mice are drawn to chicken feed, but less likely to be eating chicken manure. Properly designed and constructed coops/enclosures should prevent rats' access to chicken feed, and feed containers (metal) should be kept covered and secured.
- Some animals see chickens as prey. The most likely predators in the city – besides other people – are raccoons, loose dogs, and raptors. Responsible chicken owners will keep their chickens in a secured, fenced yard or run during the day and a secure, locked coop at night.

Human Disease

- Avian influenza, or “bird flu,” of the type contagious to humans has not been found in North America.
- Should avian influenza ever reach North America, it would more likely spread under factory farm conditions where chickens are kept in dense populations with little access to sunlight and fresh air. In small city flocks with only a few chickens reside, bird flu is unlikely to occur and spread. [Humane Society of the United States]
- Salmonella (common enterobacteria that can cause foodborne gastrointestinal illness) is the other primary human illness associated with chicken and eggs. Chickens are no more likely to carry it than parakeets and pet reptiles. Good hand-washing practices are always important after handling animals and their waste. [For more info, see the CDC's website: <http://www.cdc.gov>]

Shattering seven urban myths about raising chickens

by Patricia Foreman From the May 11, 2011 online edition of *The Plymouth Review*

The local foods movement is not only gaining ground, it is here to stay; and that includes family flocks of chickens. Chickens are the mascots of local foods because of the many talents and skill sets they innately bring to small-scale food production. These skill sets include being pestidicers (eating mosquitoes, ticks and fleas), herbicides (by eating and clearing unwanted vegetation), and organic fertilizer generators (that can help create and enhance garden soil). The trend for backyard flocks is so strong, that in the past two years, over 500 towns and cities have revised their laws to allow urban folks to keep their own chickens.

Along with the re-emergence of backyard chickens across the country, have come great numbers of misconceptions, false beliefs and downright prejudice surrounding the keeping of micro-flocks of chickens. As the co-host of the *Chicken Whisperer Backyard Poultry and Sustainable Lifestyles Talk Show*, I have heard it all.

There are seven main concerns that routinely surface when the topic of city chicks is discussed. These are: 1. disease, 2. noise, 3. waste, odor and flies, 4. predators and rodents, 5. property values, 6. appearance, and 7. What will neighbors think? Let's look at the facts behind each of these concerns.

Myth 1. Chickens carry diseases communicable to humans. **Fact:** The truth is that small flocks have literally no risk of avian flu transmission to humans. The 2006 Grain Report states: "When it comes to bird flu, diverse small-scale poultry is the solution, not the problem."

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states on their website: "There is no need at present to remove a (family) flock of chickens because of concerns regarding avian flu."

Avian flu has been in the press as a concern to commercial poultry production where birds are raised in monster-size flocks confined in overcrowded environments. This causes high stress and

compromised immune systems in the birds. Any sign of disease, including a sneeze, could result in a huge number of birds getting sick; and this puts at risk a large amount of profit. As many experts have stated publicly, the solution to avian flu is in small-scale poultry.

Myth 2. Chickens are too noisy. **Fact:** Laying hens—at their loudest—have about the same decibel level as human conversation (60 to 70 decibels). Hens are so quiet that there have been cases of family flocks being kept for years without the next door neighbors knowing it.

To some, noise is a concern with roosters and their pre-dawn heralding of sunrises. Many urban codes ban roosters, or allow them to be kept only with special permits. The noise level of a rooster's crow is about the same as a barking dog: 90 decibels. But there are ways to keep roosters quiet throughout the night. Many folks regard crowing as a pleasant sound.

Myth 3. Chickens cause waste and odor. **Fact:** A 40-pound dog generates more solid waste than 10 chickens. To be more specific, one 40-pound dog generates about .75 pounds of poop every day. Ten chickens generate about .66 pounds daily poop.

The advantage to chicken poop is that it can be used as valuable, high-nitrogen fertilizer. Unlike dog or cat poop, chicken poop can be combined with yard and leaf waste to create compost. Just as valuable, about 40 percent of the chicken manure is organic matter necessary for building fertile, healthy topsoil.

Chicken manure is so valuable that there is a product called Cockadoodle Doo. What is Cockadoodle Doo made of? You guessed it; dried chicken manure. A 20-pound bag sells for \$15. That's 76 cents a pound for chicken manure! Let's take the stakes even higher. Where does most commercial fertilizer come from? Think oil. Can chickens' services and products help us decrease our dependence on oil? Yes, in many ways and on many levels.

Myth 4. Chickens attract predators, pests and rodents. **Fact:** Predators and rodents are already living in urban areas. Wild bird feeders, pet food, gardens, fish ponds, bird baths and trash waiting to be collected all attract raccoons, foxes, rodents and flies. Modern micro-flock coops, such as chicken tractors, arks, and other pens are ways of keeping, and managing, family flocks that eliminate concerns about predators, rodents and other pests.

Indeed, chickens are part of the solution to pesky problems. Chickens are voracious carnivores and will seek out and eat just about anything that moves including ticks (think Lyme disease), fleas, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, stink bugs, slugs, and even mice, baby rats and small snakes.

Myth 5. Property values will decrease. **Fact:** There is not one single documented case that we know of about a next door family flock that has decreased the value of real estate. On the contrary, local foods and living green is so fashionable, that some realtors and home sellers are offering a free chicken coop with every sale. An example of this can be found at www.GreenWayNews.com.

Myth 6. Coops are ugly. **Fact:** Micro-flock coop designs can be totally charming, upscale and even whimsical. Some of them are architect designed and cost thousands of dollars. Common design features include blending in with the local architectural style, matching the slope of the roof and complementing color schemes. For examples go to www.MyPetChicken.com.

Myth 7. What will neighbors think? **Fact:** You can't control what anyone thinks, much less your neighbor.

Once folks gain more experience with the advantages and charms of chickens, most prejudice and fear evaporates; especially when you share some of those fresh, heart-healthy, good-for-you eggs from your family flock.

There is one huge advantage to family flocks that is often overlooked during chicken debates. That is their role and value in solid waste management systems. Chickens, as clucking civic workers, are biomass recyclers and can divert tons of organic matter from the trash collection and landfills.

Chickens will eat just about all kitchen "waste." They love people food, even those "gone-by" leftovers that have seasoned in the refrigerator. Combine their manure with grass clippings, fallen leaves and garden waste, and you create compost. Composting with chicken helpers keeps tons of biomass out of municipal trash collection systems.

All this can save big time taxpayer dollars, which is especially valuable in these times of stressed municipal budgets.

There is precedence for employing family flocks as part of trash management. It is being done very successfully in some European towns. One example is the town of Deist in Flanders, Belgium. The city buys laying hens to give to residents who want them. The chickens' job is to divert food waste from the trash stream and eliminates having to be picked up by workers, transported, and then disposed. The savings are significant.

May the flock be with you...and to quote the Chicken: "evermore."

Patricia Foreman is the author of several books including *City Chicks: Keeping Micro-flocks of Chickens as Garden Helpers, Compost Creators, Biomass Recyclers and Local Food Suppliers*, and *Chicken Tractor: The Permaculture Guide to Happy Hens and Healthy Soil*, available from Backyard Poultry's online bookstore at www.backyardpoultrymag.com.

Available at: http://www.plymouth-review.com/news/2011-0510/Neighbors/Shattering_seven_urban_myths_about_raising_chicken.html

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Chicken FAQs

What's the difference between a chicken and a rooster?	Nothing, really! <i>Chicken</i> is a generic term used to refer to both sexes. A hen is female; a rooster is male.
Do I need a rooster to get eggs from my hen?	No, a hen will lay eggs regardless of whether or not a rooster is present.
Where do you get chicks?	You can buy them at Belmont Feed and Seed, the Feed Store in Summit, or you can order them from a hatchery. Shipping is stressful, so I'd recommend the store route.
How many chickens can I have?	Check your village or city's ordinances. Laws vary from locale to locale.
Do I have to have a coop?	Yes, absolutely. Chickens need to be protected from both aerial and ground predators.
I have a cat. Will it kill my chickens?	A cat will probably not take on an adult chicken, but you might lose a chick or two. However, my cat when I was growing up used to let the chicks ride around on her back. She never bothered them. Keep an eye on the cat and how it acts toward the birds.
I have a dog. Will it kill my chickens?	My opinion is that dogs are more of a threat than cats. It depends on the breed. My dog was a German shepherd/golden retriever mix. He grew up with the chickens, goats, sheep, and other animals. He knew they were his to protect and never harmed them. HOWEVER , keep an eye on the dog; behavioral cues can reveal a lot. Also if hens are around a dog that barks a lot, it will be upsetting to the birds and could interfere with laying.
What do I do with the chickens in the winter?	Keep your coop in a place that is protected from the wind. Provide lots of straw or other bedding that will trap heat. Give the birds plenty of protein-rich food and fresh water. Some people put a red bulb (not white, which can create problems with laying cycles) in the coop to provide extra heat.
How often do I feed and water them?	I recommend feeding twice daily. They should have fresh water every day, too. Be sure to scrub out their food and water dishes to prevent bacterial illnesses.
Can chickens fly?	Not very well, but well enough to clear a fence.
How do I catch a loose chicken?	Run fast! Try to corner it or wait until they roost for the evening. Chickens don't see well at night.
How many eggs does a hen lay per day?	A hen lays one egg a day.
How many eggs will a hen lay per year?	It depends on breed, the age of the bird, and environment. Certain hybrid varieties (ISA Browns) will lay nearly year round, but this taxes the body. Well-nourished hens produce better than those who are nutrient deficient and dehydrated. A hen will lay best between 1 and 3 years of age.
How difficult is it to keep chickens?	It's been compared to keeping a dog – except you don't have to walk them. You do need to feed and water daily and clean out the coop several times a month.
Can I hatch eggs?	Only if 1) you have a rooster 2) you have a breed of hen that goes broody (or you have an incubator). Keep in mind, though, that 50% of your hatch will be male. Figure out beforehand what happens to the boys!

Source: urbanchickenconsultant.wordpress.com/chicken-faqs/

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Services and Rates

Service	Components	Rate**
Home to Roost presentations	Presentations on chickens for your community, library, or school. Call or email to request more information.	Rate varies; contact us for information.
General consultation	Evaluation of your flock and overall animal husbandry. (1 hr min)	\$75/hr + mileage
Assessment consultation "How will chickens fit into my life?"	A visit to your residence to assess space and coop plan, provide information on caring for chickens, and answer questions at time of consultation or via e-mail follow-up. (1 hr min)	\$75/hr + mileage
New Babies consultation "It's a girl! Where's the instruction manual?"	A visit to your residence to advice on and/or assistance with new chicks, including setting up brooder box; information on feeding, watering, and general care of chicks, information about common illnesses in chicks; answers to questions at time of consultation or via e-mail follow-up. (1 hr min)	\$75/hr + mileage
Empty Nest consultation "All grown up! Now what?"	A visit to your residence to move hens to the coop; information on feeding, watering, egg laying, etc.; answers to questions at time of consultation or via e-mail follow-up. (1 hr min)	\$75/hr + mileage
Healthy Hen consultation "How are the ladies?"	A visit to your residence to make sure that your hens are healthy; information on feeding, watering, egg laying, and common illnesses; answers to your questions. (1 hr min)	\$75/hr + mileage
Emergency phone call "Oh, no! My chicken is sick!"	Troubleshooting advice over the phone for a sick bird; referral to avian veterinarians or phone call fee can be applied to Emergency House Call fee within 24 hours (about 20 min)	\$75/hr, \$25 minimum
Emergency house call "Oh, no! My chicken is sick!"	A visit to your residence to assess a sick bird on the same day, if possible; research to determine possible causes of sickness; care to address problem, if possible, OR suggestions for care (may include referral for veterinary medicine); suggestions for follow-up care and care for other members of flock. (1 hr min)	\$100 + mileage
Necropsy "What happened, and was it preventable?"	Dissection of deceased chicken; necropsy notes and photos will be sent to poultry diagnostician. Condition of bird used to suggest changes to animal husbandry.	\$75 + mileage
Home to Roost package	Includes 4 on-site consultations of 1 hr each; 30 minutes of phone consultation; 1 emergency house call of 1 hr	\$375 + mileage
Expert witness testimony and letter writing	Expert testimony and documentation for individuals or municipalities, in accordance with our knowledge of best practices and observations of the flock, coop, or property in question.	Contact us for rates.
Boarding and chicken-sitting services	Care for your flock when you're out of town; contact us for more information.	Contact us for rates.
Busy Biddies add-on service "Can you help me get stuff?"	Procurement of supplies needed for your chickens; all goods purchased will be sold to you at-cost with no mark-up.	\$50 per hour, billable in ½- hour increments

Need something not on this list? Just ask!

**Fees are due at time of service, except for the Home to Roost Package, which is prepaid at the Assessment Consultation. Methods of payment include cash, check, and PayPal (convenience fee applies for PayPal).