
Biosecurity

Dedicated Clothing, Tools and Routine

Have a dedicated set of clothing and tools for working with your birds, including shoes. Work with your birds first thing in the morning and shower before leaving your property. Always wash your hands immediately before and after handling the birds.

New Bird Quarantine

Before adding a new bird to your flock, it should be separated from other animals for a minimum of 3 weeks. Look for any signs of disease in this time period, and call your veterinarian if signs develop. Work with quarantined birds only after you have already finished with your established flock.

Equipment

Although sharing farm equipment with another poultry enthusiast may seem convenient, it is a major biosecurity risk that can rapidly spread disease between farms. Use your own equipment if possible, and if using shared equipment, ensure that it is properly disinfected before and after each use to minimize biosecurity risks.

References

Resources for the content of this brochure include:
The University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine
Penn State Extension - extension.psu.edu
Merck Veterinary Manual - merckvetmanual.com
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.cdc.gov
Backyard Chickens Blog - www.backyardchickens.com

Avian Influenza

As you become a participant in the poultry industry, it is your responsibility to be able to recognize and report potential Avian Influenza infections in your birds. Clinical signs of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) are a combination of respiratory (gasping) and digestive (diarrhea) signs, followed by rapid death. There may be swelling around neck, eyes, and purple discoloration of the head and legs. *If your flock experiences a sudden increase in mortality or has a high percentage of birds with signs as outlined above, please report this immediately to your veterinarian.* For more information on HPAI, visit the USDA online at: www.USDA.gov/avianinfluenza.

Common Signs of Disease

Always look for signs of illness in your birds, including: inappetence, lameness, diarrhea, respiratory distress, external parasites, and any obvious abnormalities of the eyes, wattle, comb, and feet.

Veterinary Contact Info

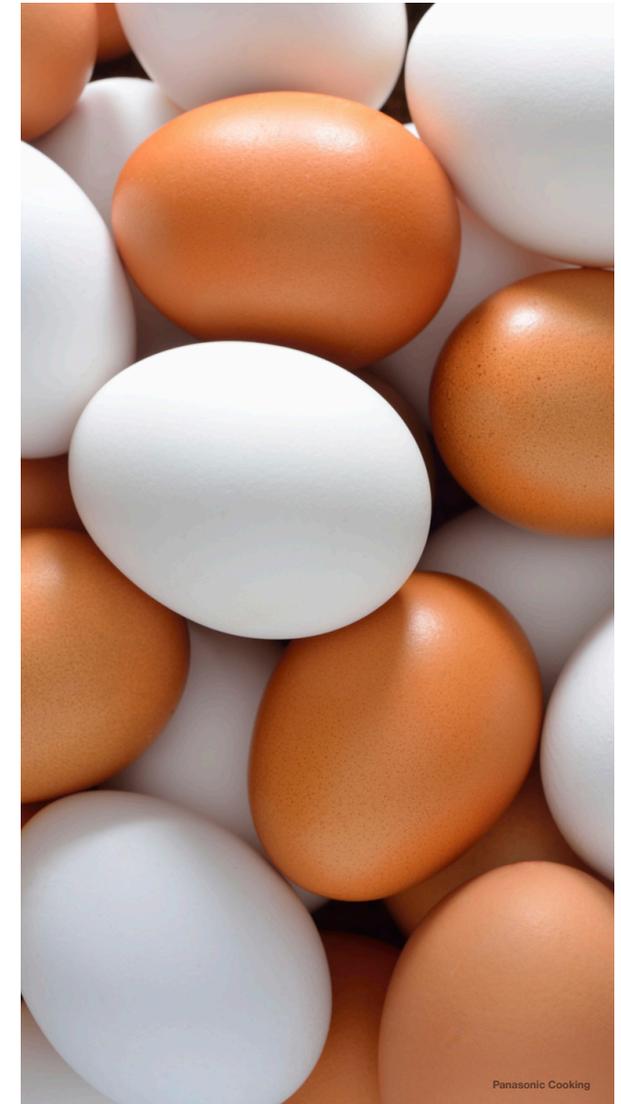
You are encouraged to contact your local veterinarian if you encounter any disease concerns with your flock. They can contact state officials and other agencies as they see fit.

Department of Agriculture

Your state department of agriculture is an invaluable resource for questions or concerns regarding your backyard flock. Contact information by state can be found at <http://www.rma.usda.gov/other/stateag>.

Starting Your Backyard Layer Flock

A beginner's guide to backyard poultry



Before Getting Started

Laws and Regulations

Before beginning this endeavor, check with your local authorities concerning zoning laws and restrictions about whether you are permitted to raise food animals on your property.

Breed and Purpose Considerations

Be aware that there are many breeds of birds to purchase, and that each one may have its own profile of production benefits. Chicken breeds are divided into layer and broiler types, for egg and meat production respectively.



Choosing a Supplier

Hatcheries, farm supply stores, online retailers and other poultry enthusiasts are common sources to obtain birds. The most important consideration in selecting your supplier is reputability. The supplier should be able to provide information not only on which vaccinations are administered, but the timing of each one. Many diseases in poultry are caused by mismanagement, starting from before the birds are even hatched.

Housing Considerations

Coop Design

Above all else, chicken coops should meet a few basic criteria: be readily cleaned, provide shelter from the elements and natural predators, and provide an enclosure to comfortably sleep and nest.



An optimal design includes both indoor and outdoor areas with sufficient space for perching, roosting, nesting, feeders and waterers. The coop should be covered from above to prevent predation by other birds and fences should extend below ground level to keep digging-predators out.

Bedding and Litter Substrates

Wood shavings are an optimal substrate choice, as they retain the least amount of moisture and environmental debris to keep your flock clean and healthy. Alternatives include sand and straw, but extra considerations must be taken to ensure they remain dry and clean.

Lighting and Temperature

Egg-laying is regulated by exposure to light. If birds are to lay year-round, artificial light within the coop must provide 14-16 hours of continuous light.

Chickens can tolerate temperature fluctuations in a temperate climate, as long as they are kept clean and dry. Additional considerations must be made for insulation and proper ventilation.

Nutrition

Feed Selection

Use of commercial feeds is always preferred over homemade diets. Commercial feeds are formulated with the appropriate nutrients and minerals to ensure your birds remain healthy throughout production. When purchasing a commercial feed, it is critical to select one that is life-stage appropriate.

Life Stages

Starter diet: 0-6 weeks

Grower diet: 6-18 weeks

Layer diet: from first egg lay

Water Source

Water has the potential to be contaminated at any point in the system, from a well or holding tank to waterers within the coop. Testing and cleaning should be done regularly to minimize the risk of disease.

Egg Handling

Collection and Storage

Collecting eggs twice daily is recommended, as this minimizes shell damage and contamination.

Eggs should be properly refrigerated at 45°F or lower, and used as soon as possible. Shell eggs should NOT be frozen.

Selling Eggs

If you choose to sell eggs, please consult your state agricultural extension website for pertinent laws and regulations.