

Backyard hens are making increasingly popular pets, ranging from little bantams, rescue hens or the big breeds such as Buff Orpingtons. Their cheeky personalities and prospect of eggs make them very appealing.

Accommodation



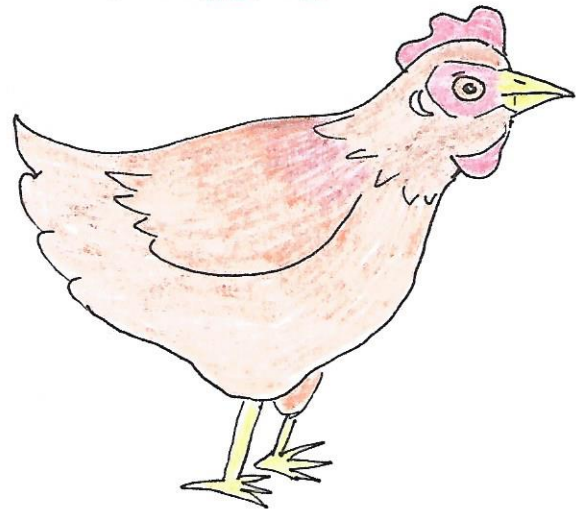
Chickens will need a coop and run, and ideally access to a secure garden (you will need to partition off anything you don't want the hens to peck or dig up!). It is important to ensure that accommodation is rat proof and fox proof. It is also important to keep the coop clean to avoid the build-up of harmful parasites such as red mite. A daily "poo pick" is recommended. Clean the coop once a week: wipe down with a suitable cleaner, then lay down newspaper and top with dust extracted sawdust/chicken bedding, add straw to the nest boxes (optional) and dust with diatomaceous earth. Remember to sweep the run out weekly too!

Diet and health

Layers pellets or mash will make up 80% of the diet with additional treats such corn, salad (but not avocado), fruit and vegetables. Feeding bread is not recommended. Fresh water should be available at all times. You may wish to add supplements such as tonic or cider vinegar. Regular checks included making sure eyes are bright, no discharge from nostrils, vent is clean, check no flaking of legs and check feathers for mites.



Guide to Chickens



Tumours

Ex-commercial hens are particularly at risk due to the high demands on their bodies to produce eggs. Older hens can develop tumours in their reproductive organs. Tumours are also caused by Marek's disease (herpes virus) and others by mainly viral causes, particularly retroviruses. Tumours can be found almost anywhere in the chicken as lymphoid tissue is spread throughout the bird and can include avian leucosis, sarcoma and squamous cell carcinoma.

Not all vets specialise in poultry so make sure you do a lot of research before deciding to get hens.