

Agricultural Info Sheet

Backyard Poultry in Chester County

Small-scale, non-commercial raising of chickens and other fowl is an increasingly popular activity for those interested in access to fresh eggs, composted manure for gardens, teaching children about where food comes from and even helping control tick populations. However, it is imperative that homeowners follow certain steps to ensure a positive experience for themselves, their neighbors and their flock.

Common Questions

Am I allowed to raise backyard poultry?

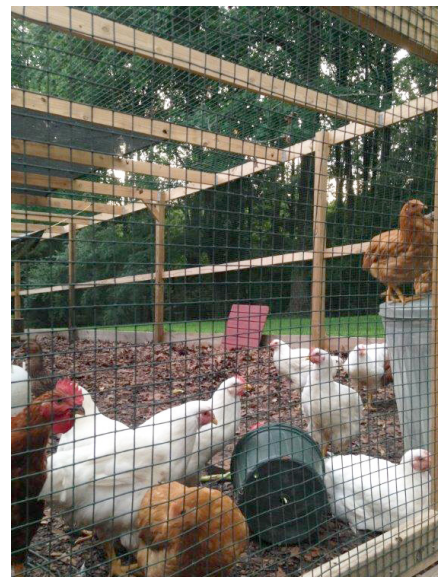
Check with your municipality as zoning rules vary. Many have restrictions on setbacks, lot size (that will determine whether or not you may keep backyard poultry) and/or maximum number of birds per lot size. Some require backyard poultry permits. Most municipalities do not allow roosters in backyard poultry situations.

In addition, all municipalities have a nuisance ordinance which likely addresses noise, smells, public health concerns, attracting pests and cleanliness. Poultry keeping doesn't necessarily cause these issues but responsible coop owners should consider all of these concerns when planning to keep poultry.



How much space do I need for my flock?

Penn State Extension recommends a minimum of one square foot per pound of bird, up to three square feet per bird of indoor coop space. Yard space is not necessary, however if you want to provide an exercise area, a minimum of two square feet per pound of bird is suggested. ([Raising Fowl in Urban Areas](#))



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What considerations should I take into account so my neighbors will love my chickens as much as I do?

Be on the lookout for predators of all kinds including dogs, foxes and hawks. Although free range poultry keeping may sound appealing, be aware that this practice may result in increased poultry loss.

Consider insulating coop walls and using vegetative buffers to reduce sound.

Keep all feed in secure containers to prevent rodent activity. Regularly check for signs of vermin and pests.

Keep your enclosures clean and dry. Regularly clean cage pans and litter to reduce odors and maintain good chicken health. Poultry keepers must have a manure management plan, even for just a couple of birds. The [Chester County Conservation District](#) is a good resource to learn how to prepare your manure management plan.

Follow municipal zoning on required setbacks from neighboring properties to help reduce potential noise and odor issues.



Plan for poultry mortality. It is unavoidable even in the best circumstances. Dispose of any carcasses in a prompt and sanitary manner.

Keep up to date on poultry health issues, especially avian influenza, no matter the size of your flock.

Important Considerations

Keeping backyard poultry may not save you money on eggs. The cost of feeding, housing and caring for chickens, who only lay for a set period of time (primarily 12-18 months upon maturity), will likely not be cheaper than buying eggs at the store. In fact, you may spend more pursuing your hobby. (“Coping with Coops” Penn State Extension presentation)

Hatching chicks from eggs can be a fun project, but you may end up with roosters. Since many municipalities prohibit roosters, you will be responsible for relocating them.



Birds require daily care. Have a plan for who will help care for your flock when you are away or otherwise unable.

Hens do not need a rooster to lay eggs.

While many municipalities allow backyard flocks, not all allow for on-site slaughtering. Investigate what practices are permitted if your interest goes beyond eggs.

For a more comprehensive list of backyard poultry best practices, go to Penn State Extension's [Small Poultry Flocks page](#).