

# Chicken Housing

## 12 Characteristics of a Successful Coop Design

- 1) is easy to clean
- 2) has good drainage
- 3) protects the flock from wind and sun
- 4) keeps out rodents, wild birds, and predatory animals
- 5) provides adequate space for flock size
- 6) is well ventilated
- 7) is free of drafts
- 8) maintains a uniform temperature
- 9) has a place where birds can roost
- 10) has nests that entice hens to lay indoors
- 11) offers plenty of light – natural and artificial
- 12) includes sanitary feed and water stations

Keep your coop simple – no nooks and crannies. A coop tall enough for you to stand in makes it easier to clean. If you build a low coop, design your coop like a chest freezer with a hinged roof you can open for cleaning.

Your coop should have a chicken door and a people door. The chicken door should be approximately 10" wide by 13" tall opening downward to form a ramp for birds to use when they enter and exit. Be sure all doors can be securely fastened at night.

Layers need about 4.0' sq. feet of space per bird. If you have a chicken yard, the space can be smaller. A covered area adjoining the coop will encourage your birds to stay outside. Fresh air has two advantages: the birds will be healthier and the coop will stay cleaner.

### Ventilation

Compared to other animals, chickens have a high respiration rate, causing them to use up available oxygen quickly and release large amounts of carbon dioxide, heat, and moisture. As a result, chickens are highly susceptible to respiratory problems. Ventilation holes near the ceiling along the south and north walls give warm moist air a place to escape. Screen ventilation holes to keep out wild birds which may carry parasites or disease. Drop down covers will allow you to cover the vent holes when needed.

In the summer, you may need a fan to further improve ventilation.

To keep the coop from getting too hot, insulate the roof and walls. Be sure to cover the insulation so the chickens can't peck it. Paint the outside of the house a light color. Place an awning or other cover over the yard.

## **Ventilation Quick Check**

Use your nose and eyes to check for proper ventilation. If you smell ammonia fumes and see thick cobwebs, your coop is not adequately ventilated.

## **Flooring - Basic Kinds**

Dirt – cheap and easy to install. A coop with a dirt floor is not easy to clean and cannot be made rodent proof.

Wood – economical – must be at least 1' off the ground to discourage mice and rats from nesting in the space beneath. Wood floors are hard to clean, especially since the cracks between the boards invariably get packed with filth.

Concrete – most expensive – but – impervious to rodents and the easiest to clean.

## **Bedding**

Wood shavings – especially pine and cedar – inexpensive and easy to manage

Rice and peanut hulls – not absorbent enough to make good litter

Straw – mats too easily – combined with manure is very messy

Dried leaves - plentiful – packs too readily

Shredded paper – inexpensive – tends to mat and retain moisture

## **Roosts**

Should be about 2 inches across

Place roosts 1-3 feet above the floor and 18 inches from the wall

Allow 8-12" of perching space per chicken

Do not use plastic or metal pipe – too slippery

An old ladder makes a good roost. Should have flat, not round, steps

## **Nests**

One nest per every four hens

Size – 14"x14"

Inside should be dark

Place nest box(s) 18 – 20 inches off the ground.

Make a 45 degree sloped roof to keep chickens from sitting on the roof

Add a 4" sill to keep eggs from rolling out

A perch just below the entrance gives hens a place to land before entering.

Line with clean litter (I prefer cedar shavings)

## **Litter Management**

Start young birds on bedding a minimum of 4 inches and work up to 10 inches. Do not allow litter to become packed. Remove wet patches of litter. Stir the litter as often as necessary to keep the surface from crusting over. If you keep the litter neither too wet or too dry, it will naturally compost.

To test litter moisture, pick up a handful and squeeze. If the moisture level is correct, the litter will stick slightly to your hand but will break up when you let go. If it is too dry, it won't stick to your hand. If it is too wet, it will ball up and not easily break apart when you drop it.

A properly managed litter system can stay in place for years, provided the bedding doesn't get damp and no serious disease breaks out. Realistically, you will probably need to do a complete litter cleaning more often - probably every 6 months. If summers are quite hot, you may want to clean the coop each spring and put the old litter in your compost bin.

## Coop Cleanup

Frequently clean feeders and waterers.

Scrape caked manure from perches

Remove dust and cobwebs from walls and corners

Schedule a major cleanup in the spring – remove old litter (spray lightly first to keep down dust and wear a dust mask). Disinfect walls and equipment with a solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of hot water.

## Plastic Storage Box Chick Brooder



## Cardboard Brooder



## Wooden Brooder Box

