**Chickens – Care Sheet**

**Chicken:** *Gallus gallus domesticus*

More people are starting to discover the benefits of keeping chickens in the backyard. Most people adopt chickens to enjoy the best, freshest eggs, only to find out they also adopted a great pet with a lively personality! Just like any other pet, it is important to take the proper steps to keep your chicken happy, healthy, and laying eggs.

**Basic Info**

Age: 6-8 years, although many roosters can live more than 10 years

Size: 12.5 in-18 in., depending on the breed

Weight: 4-7 lbs., depending on the breed. Some can weigh significantly less, while some more.

**Behavior**

Chickens are social birds; they incubate eggs and raise young communally. Therefore, we recommend that you do not just adopt one chicken. Your chickens will establish a “pecking” order for access to food and nesting locations. This is normal behavior. If a chicken is removed from the flock or a new one is introduced, they will need to sort themselves out again. Many owners of chickens are surprised when they see how tame their chickens become. You may even ascend to the top of the pecking order! Some chickens even respond well to being picked up.

**Diet**

Chickens need a well-balanced diet that includes carbs, protein, vitamins, and minerals. It’s important they have the correct feed for their life stage. You can make sure your chicken gets this by buying layer feed that comes in pellet or crumble form. Also spread out what is known as “scratch,” a mix of seeds and grains that chickens will scratch in the dirt for, but this is a supplement to the laying pellets. They will supplement this by foraging in your yard for grasses, bugs, seeds, and maybe even the occasional mouse. Additionally, your chicken will love treats of red worms, fresh fruit and vegetable scraps, and oats and other grains. Make sure they always have a ready supply of fresh, clean water.

If you adopted your chickens for egg production, then it is important that they have enough calcium. You can buy crushed oyster shells to mix into their feed.

**Environment & Caging**

While chickens live outside, it is important that they feel safe and secure if you want them to lay eggs. This means having a coop that is sturdy and weatherproof. Additionally, make sure there is as little chance as possible of predators sneaking into your yard. Reinforcing the sides of the pen with wire under the ground helps prevent predators from digging in, and using small gauge wire on the sides helps prevent predators from reaching inside.

Make sure your backyard has many different areas for them to explore. This includes:

* Grass
* Shrubs
* Logs
* A dry area where they can give themselves a dust bath
* A shaded area
* Places to scratch at the ground

The coop should be as large as possible, so the chickens have plenty of room to move around, roost, and lay eggs. Additionally, with a large opening, it will be easier for you to clean it! It will be easier for you to clean if the coop contains droppings boards underneath the perches and line the floor of the cage with sacks that you then cover with shavings. It’s important to keep the coop clean and dry, and to keep perches clean and free of rough surfaces to prevent foot problems.

**Veterinary Care**

While chickens are quite hardy, they are susceptible to illness and disease just like any other animal. An alert chicken is a good sign of a healthy chicken. Look for changes in behavior or mood that could indicate a bigger problem. Respiratory infections, egg laying issues, foot problems, and wounds or predator attacks are all common.

We recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months so we can do a routine exam as well as a fecal exam to make sure your chicken is in top shape. Internal parasites are common in chickens and can cause serious disease.