

A-Z

HEALTHY CHICKEN encyclopedia



Abigail @ Sage & Shepherd Farm

Welcome

So you want chickens? Or you maybe you already have them, but you want to learn the very best way you can take care of them, right? Well this guide is for you! Focused on pasture raised chickens, I created this guide for you as a easy A-Z resource. So when you hear something in the world of homesteading and farming, you can refer back to this, grab the definition and learn something valuable in you efforts for a healthy flock! I've even created an index for you so you can hone in on the exact thing you're looking for.

Once you have chickens there is no guaranteeing you won't want a donkey, some goats, or even sheep! They are a gateway animal.... and there's a reason for that. They have a low start-up cost, are easy to care for, take up less space and require less land to get started.

You're on the right track.

Chicken is one of the largest meat industries: it highly regulated, unhealthy, full of antibiotics and hormones, and the chickens are raised inhumanly. So, pat yourself on the back for wanting to raise you own healthy flock.

-abbigail

IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW: chicken terms

CHICK

Baby chicken
(those insanely
cute, little, yellow,
fluffy things)



PULLET

A female chicken less
than a year old (who
hasn't started laying
eggs yet)



COCKEREL

A male chicken less
than a year old



HEN

A female
chicken, (who lays
eggs now- yay!)

BROILER

A meat bird
(male or female),
usually a
commercial breed

ROOSTER

A male chicken
older than a year
(who starts to get
protective...)

LAYERS/LAYING HEN
Hens who just lay
eggs and are not used
for meat



BANTAM

Chickens that are
bred to be smaller
than average
(great for small back-
yards)

AMMONIA

A

The awful smell you might encounter when you come close to musty chicken coops or factory farms. It is a colourless gas, and is caused by damp and unventilated coops. If not fixed, it may cause your chickens to go blind, plus it's just not good anyone to inhale. Ventilation is key in your coop!

BREED

Choosing the right breed is very important. Depending on your climate, your need, and your space, you must choose accordingly. There are many different birds that will be well suited to your needs.

B

GOOD EGG LAYERS

Ancona, White Leghorn, Rhode Island Red, Plymouth Rock

GOOD MEAT BIRDS

Cornish Cross, Freedom Ranger, Orpington

GOOD FORAGERS

Wyandotte, Ancona, Rhode Island Red

COOP

C

Skip the coop in a traditional sense, and get a mobile coop! The traditional coop-and-run is cute and pretty, and all over Instagram, but it doesn't serve the chickens the same way. They are constantly running around in the same outdoor area in their own manure, get no new grass, and it needs to be 'mucked' out weekly. Versus a mobile coop that can be pulled along fresh greens and evenly spreads out chicken manure along its way.



DISINFECTANTS

When was the last time you cleaned your chicken waterer, or feeder? Mold and germs can build up in there quickly. It is important to clean often and use good disinfectants such as vinegar, and bleach. Bleach I use when the chickens won't be using it again or as more of a deep clean, and vinegar I use every couple weeks as maintenance.

D

EGGS

Getting your first ever freshly hatched egg is one of the most excited things. It seems like such a big deal for such a little animal to pop out such magic! And it is! So you're going to want to treasure them.

E

Every egg contains what's called a bloom on it (this almost invisible coating on the egg shell that seals in freshness). If you keep the bloom on, ie. don't wash or scrub it off, you can store your eggs on the counter. But if there is gunk on the egg and you must get it off, try dry brushing with a paper towel - you will keep the bloom in tact. If that doesn't work and you need to you can wash the egg, be sure to use water that is warmer than the egg, as cold water allows bacteria to get inside the egg. Store these washed eggs in the fridge.

WONDERING IF A ROUGE EGG IS STILL GOOD? PUT IT IN A GLASS OF WA-

IF IT FLOATS TO THE TOP,
It's gone bad, don't eat it!

IF IT SINKS HORIZONTALLY,
It's super fresh, enjoy!

IF IT SINKS VERTICALLY,
It's 2-3 weeks old, still edible!



FEED

Using medicated feed for chicks and GMO feed for chickens (might not scientifically lead to sick chickens) but since the reason we are raising our own chicks is to be healthy, using healthier feed can really give your chickens a boost and be healthier for you in the long run. Use organic and non-gmo feed when you can.

F

GRIT

G

Grit are tiny rocks that the chickens eat to help their digestion. There are 2 different types of grit - soluble (oyster shell) and insoluble (granite). The insoluble helps them break down food, while the soluble helps add a source of calcium. Insoluble grit is more needed than soluble.

HEART FAILURE

H

Depending on what breed of chickens you are raising, this one is hard to avoid. Cornish Cross (White Rocks) are susceptible to Sudden Death Syndrome, which is where they pretty much just fall dead in 2 seconds flat. Other breeds like Red Rangers and many heritage breeds are much healthier and probably won't have it happen to them. Cornish Cross die more frequently because they are bred so much. Stick to heritage breeds and you shouldn't have a problem.

INBREEDING

Don't do it! This goes without saying and is unhealthy for every species, including humans - duh!! With chickens, it is easier to avoid if you start on the right track. Make sure your rooster and your hens are separate blood lines. Once that is known, they can do all the fertilizing they want! Inbreeding causes deformities and leads to health problems.

I

JAKE

J

The term used for a young male turkey. I included this because most of the terms in this guide can be applied to turkeys. Turkeys are one of our favorites! Once you have raised chickens, getting turkeys is a no brainer - they might even be easier to raise ;).

KILL CONE

A device used to kill chickens at home; a upside down triangle made of plastic or metal. This is one of the easiest ways to process chickens at home. You put the bird in upside down and pull the head through the triangle tip. It is humane and pleasant for the animal, as being upside down calms the chicken.

You can make your own using zip ties and a 5-gallon bucket. Just make sure the zip tie head is on the outside of the bucket so it doesn't hurt the chicken when going in.

K

LAMENESS

L

The inability for a chicken to walk; limping; or what might seem like dizziness - most common in Cornish Cross. Due to their high growth rate, their legs can't keep up with their weight. It is also a common symptom of vitamin deficiency. So be sure to check that before making any other rash conclusions, as these symptoms are sometimes confused for marek's disease.

MAREK'S DISEASE

An viral infection that shows symptoms of paralysis, mucus in eye, droopy wings, etc. Once the chicken has been infected, it contaminates the property for future chickens. It is highly contagious, but don't worry you or your other farm animals can't get it. You can get your chicks vaccinated (which in this case, is a good idea) but it only protects prior to them coming in contact with the disease. If they come in contact after they have been vaccinated, it will not cure them, simply stop the signs of paralysis.

M

NESTING BOX

N

The cozy spot your chicken lays eggs. It is important your laying hens have a safe and private spot to lay. This will help your birds consistently lay in the same spot and feel safe. Be sure to raise it off the ground about 18", add a nice base of nesting material such as straw, hay, grass clippings or pine shavings, make sure its private, and add a lip onto it so the bird doesn't scratch out all of the shavings.

TRY:

Laying fake eggs, or golf balls in your nesting box to encourage your birds to lay in the same spot.

OPEN SPACE

Giving your birds access to the outdoors is a total game changer and something they truly love. Access to sun (for layers this is crucial for egg production) and grass, (giving them lots of beta carotenoids) is crucial for healthy pasture raised birds.

O

PASTY BUTT

P

A condition that affects chicks - when their poop gets stuck on their butt, dries up, and prevents future poops from coming out. I know, glamorous way of saying it, but you get the picture right? It is recommend to check their cute, fluffy butts every couple of days. If you find dried poop, wet a paper towel and rub off.

TRY:

Adding apple cider vinegar and crushed garlic to their water, not only does this help with their nutrition, it also keeps things regular and in good consistency.

QUALITY OF LIFE

This one goes without saying. The reason you are raising your own chicken in the first place is probably because you care about how animals are treated. So naturally, you will treat yours with care and respect. A stress free animals is a happy animal.

Q

ROOST

R

The place where chickens 'perch' at night (aka. their bed). Chickens will start roosting between 4-6 weeks of age. Because of their weight and weak legs, it is not recommend for broilers to roost. Jumping to a perch can hurt their legs, and it also causes breast blisters. Layers, however need a spot to roost!

DIY:

Use 2x2's to create an easy and effective roost. Wood is best because it has grip and stays warmer than metal for their feet. It is recommend to raise the first bar at least 1' off the ground, and 1' apart from the other.

Our chickens always go to the very top bar!



STRESS

Avoid stress all together. A stressed animal is a sad animal. Causes of stress include: weather and temperature change, overcrowding, sickness/infection/parasites, inconsistent feed and water, etc. Look for signs of cannibalism, lethargy, chickens not eating, or chickens crowding together in an open space.

S

TOXIC

T

If you are letting your chickens free roam they usually have a pretty good instinct of stuff not to eat. We haven't had any problems with our layers who roam the property. But if you are feeding your birds with kitchen scraps be sure to steer away from avocado pit and peel, potato peels, uncooked beans, caffeine, or alcohol. Other toxic things for chickens include: unidentified mushrooms, cedar (do not use cedar shaving for chicks), hemlock, yew, and milkweed.

UNSEXED

Chicks that have not been determined if they are male or female. If you're getting broilers, getting them unsexed will save you money at the hatchery, there will also be a lower mortality rate.

U

VACCINATIONS

V

Shots that are given to day-old chicks or injected into the eggs before hatching. Some are good, some are bad. We only get the marek's vaccine because that disease is deadly and highly infectious!

WATERERS

What your chicken drinks out of. It may seem easy to choose a waterer, but after going through many we have some favourites! Look for easy to clean waterers (we recommend plastic), waterers that are easy to carry, have a large enough capacity so that you're not refilling twice a day, and one that is stable.

W

[CLICK THIS: Review of The Best Chicken Waterers + DIY](#)





Matthew French/The Globe And Mail

XANTHOPHYLL

X

The coloured pigment that's found in plants (also known as carotenoids). The more green they eat the more yellow they become! This same pigment gives the chickens their colour. If you pasture raised chickens their fat and yolks become more yellow, naturally.

YOLK COLOUR

As stated above the colour in the yolk is dependent on what they eat and how much xanthophyll they get. It is a highly controversial thing, the statement that 'the more rich in colour your yolk is the healthier it is'... I'll let you decide. It is however cool to be able to tell what your chicken ate by their yolk colour. Raising your own you would know, but if you're out or buy eggs from the store it's handy!

Y

INTERESTING EGG YOLK COLOUR FACTS: WHAT DOES YOUR CHICKEN

PALE YELLOW YOLK	RICH YELLOW YOLK	GREEN YOLK	RED/BLACK YOLK
Wheat and white corn	Alfalfa meal, marigold petals, grass, leafy greens, and yellow corn	Acorns and shepherd's purse	Cottonseed meal and silage

ZOONOSIS

Z

A disease that is transmittable to humans and other animals. Your chicken could be sick without you even knowing, as they might not display symptoms. You can get this from contaminated equipment, touching infected chickens, infected insects, and contaminated dust. It's super rare, but important to know.

TIP:

Practice good bio-security to avoid this! Wash your hands after contact, do not touch your mouth or eyes, wash your clothes after along farm day, where a respirator when doing work that creates dust, and wear gloves or coveralls over your clothes.

INDEX

WORD

LETTER

Bantam	(B)
Biosecurity	(Z)
Bloom	(E)
Broilers	(B)
Cannibalism	(S)
Carotenoids	(X)
Chicken Tractor	(C)
Coops	(A)
Crowding	(S)
Dizziness	(L)
Egg Storage	(E)
Foragers	(B)
Granite	(G)
Layers	(B)
Lethargy	(S)
Limping	(L)
Meat Birds	(B)
Medicated Feed	(F)
Mobile Coop	(C)
Mucus	(M)
Oyster Shell	(G)
Paralysis	(L, M)
Perch	(R)
Poisonous	(T)
Processing	(K)
Run	(C)
Sudden Death Syndrome	(H)
Turkeys	(J)
Ventilation	(A)
Vinegar, ACV, White	(D)

WANT MORE?
check out our bundle below



Ready to become more self-sufficient? Do you have the homestead dream? Well, we got you covered. No matter where you are on this homestead journey or how much space you have to work with, this bundle is perfect for you. With all going on in the world today, taking charge of your dreams, your food supply, and your life is more important than ever.

LEARN MORE

ABOUT

Sage & Shepherd Farm

We're Abbagail & Mackenzie, the husband and wife duo running the farm and those are our 2 dogs Aslan & Levi.

We started this journey with a few chickens for ourselves, and fell in love with the ability to control where our food comes from and the act of farming itself. Since then, our operation has expanded greatly. We sell direct to customers, at farmers markets, to restaurants and small grocers, and ship across Ontario.

We practice regenerative agriculture methods, which build top soil, sequester carbon, and create polycultures. We want to share the message of regenerative ag, and want to inspire and help people who want to opt out of normal living!

Follow along and visit our website for more info and other resources to help your farm or homestead be successful.

want more?

FOLLOW Sage & Shepherd Farm on Instagram

FOLLOW Sage & Shepherd Farm on Pinterest

FOLLOW Sage & Shepherd Farm on Facebook

