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**[www.allspecieskinship.org](http://www.allspecieskinship.org)**

**877-596-7776**

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUNICIPAL REGULATION OF URBAN CHICKENS**

Endorsed by  
All Species Kinship  
Chicken Run Rescue  
Eastern Shore Sanctuary and Education Center  
Farm Sanctuary  
The Humane Society of the United States  
Sunnyskies Bird and Animal Sanctuary  
United Poultry Concerns  
Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary

Used by, but not limited to:  
Minneapolis, MN  
St. Paul, MN  
Cottage Grove, MN  
Stillwater, MN  
Falcon Heights, MN

## OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **DO NOT PERMIT**

-All Species Kinship does not support urban animal agriculture in the city of Battle Creek. This includes, but is not limited to, poultry, waterfowl, goats, pigs and other farmed animals.

- **IF PERMITTED**

- Permit chickens only, and as pets only
- Prohibit roosters unless special permit is provided, and for no more than 2 “house roosters” only.
- Require permit fees that are annually renewed
- Require site inspections
- Prohibit slaughter, breeding, sale *or* barter
- Limit number of birds to **5 or fewer**
- Require **100%** consent of neighbors
- Written guidelines for care (see below)
- Cap number of permits in neighborhoods
- Allot for additional administrative staff and resources
- Allot funding for capture response via All Species Kinship

## DO NOT PERMIT

- Enforcement capacity is limited; Animal Control has no expertise in farmed animal assessments. Dog/cat enforcement/compliance is already deficient.
- Free-roaming/stray farmed animals: who is capturing/containing them? This is a public safety issue that the city is not prepared to handle.
- City contracted Animal Shelter has no capacity to house confiscated or stray farmed animals.
  - What is the stray hold period for stray farmed animals (Dept of Agriculture typically states FIFTEEN DAYS once a PAPER ad has been placed). Who is safely holding them, and in what capacity are they being quarantined to prevent zoonotic and other diseases?
- All Species Kinship is the city of Battle Creek's response unit, but we receive no city funding to offset housing, vet care costs or our time. We have no contract with the city, which means it is at our discretion if we respond or not.
- Winter caretaking is a huge responsibility. The "free ranging" concept is largely void during half of the season when birds are easily susceptible to frostbite and natural foraging is not possible.
- There is no certified avian veterinarian specialist in the city of Battle Creek, or in Calhoun County. There are only two large animal vet clinics trained to see hooved animals in Calhoun Co.
- Public health and safety needs to be examined. Heat is required in coops=fire risk. Disposal of organic waste=public health.
- Who is inspecting living environments for farmed animals and approving permits (if this policy passes), and based on what knowledge/experience?
- Nearly EVERY publicly accessible city water source continues to be plagued with abandonments of domestic ducks, geese and even roosters and other breeds of game birds. There are so many that we cannot keep up with their removal due to infrequency of legitimately qualified and responsible homes.
- No environmental impact assessment of backyard animal farming has been conducted by an independent, qualified agency.
  - Backyard farming is not a humane alternative to factory farming. In reality, it is simply an extension. This is a distinction without any real differences.
  - Chicken food attracts flies/parasites, rodents AND predators=increase in nuisance animal complaints of which A.S.K. also responds to. We already get complaints on this.
  - Chickens also attract wildlife that are considered undesirable: coyotes, raptors, raccoons and mink, for example. We already get complaints on this.

These facts are absent from every promotion of keeping backyard flocks for the purposes of eggs:

- Laying hens have been bred to lay incessantly. Chickens in the wild lay fewer than 20 eggs a year and live to be 30 years old. Contemporary laying hens lay between 300 and 350 eggs a year and develop reproductive disease which is the cause of up to 90% of mortality in egg-laying flocks beginning at the age of 2 years old. Egg yolk peritonitis is very common where egg material ruptures from the worn out oviduct into the coelomic cavity. When a hen's laying begins to decline or cease, this is the common cause. It is a protracted and miserable death. Google "egg yolk peritonitis" and choose "images."
- For every laying hen there is a dead or abandoned rooster. Google "male chicks."
- Chickens are Tropical Jungle Fowl and need serious and costly protection in Michigan's extreme hot and cold climate.

## **IF PERMITTING:**

**Permit chickens only, and as pets only:** this distinction serves to protect farmed animals from being slaughtered or neglected in the city. Ducks/geese and pigs produce a significant amount of wet manure, and have much stronger odors. Their rates of abandonment are also rapid after people realize the mess they make, and time required for proper care.

**Roosters:** While A.S.K. is an organization that advocates on behalf of roosters, and maintains a rooster sanctuary, we believe that cockfighting and unintended breeding will be problematic if roosters are permitted. The issue is that it is impossible to know the gender of chickens (or ducks) until 4 to 6 months of age if people are purchasing birds through second and third party vendors such as Tractor Supply Stores or Family Farm & Fleet. Not permitting roosters means that may result in even more roosters being killed or abandoned in streets, alleys and parks. Issues of noise can be addressed by the current noise ordinances if that is a concern, *however* we do not believe that allowing roosters will resolve abandonment issues either, as people who want eggs will opt to dump/kill their roosters even if they *are* allowed. A.S.K. believes that permitting birds, regardless, is problematic, and will automatically result in more bird abandonments either when birds cease to lay, or when gender ratios are not correct. We have included recommendation to provide for people to apply for a “special house rooster permit,” to avoid some of the above concerns. This would require roosters be kept as companion pets, similar to dogs or cats, and allowed time outside with supervision only. This eliminates noise concerns, while also giving people an alternative to slaughter or placing burden on rescue organizations as ours for re-homing when they unexpectedly acquire a rooster.

**Require permit fees that are annually renewed:** this is a way for the city to generate funds for Animal Control, or for organizations like A.S.K. that responds to farm animal related cases via dispatch. This also allows for good recording of who has farmed animals, and who doesn't before problems develop with nuisance complaints and stray, or improperly contained animals. This is what is expected of owners of dogs currently.

**Require site inspections:** At least one site inspection during each permit year should be performed by Animal Control, and ideally, a more experienced representative from a third party, such as A.S.K. Consider what role city building inspectors should have as well, to prevent coop hazards, such as fires. Site inspections also verify correct application of the city standards set forth in the ordinance.

### **Prohibit slaughter, breeding, sale or barter**

**Limit number of birds to 5 or fewer:** this is the most straightforward and fair approach. The city will not have adequate enforcement as it stands, and if permittees are allowed to have a certain quantity of birds per sq ft, that could easily escalate to 100 farmed birds being kept in a 1000 sq ft lot. All other animals are regulated by quantity restrictions in the city, versus lot size. We should be consistent with farmed animals as well. Most ordinances allow between five and six birds.

**Require 100% consent of neighbors:** Neighbors whose properties *adjoin* the urban farmer's lot should be made aware of the applicant's intent, and be comfortable with their plan before the city approves permits to help avoid nuisance complaints. This consent is also important to prevent people from obtaining chickens on a whim and to preserve neighborhood peace by respecting the rights of neighbors. Often neighbors are concerned about the treatment of birds in neighboring yards but are not willing to call Animal Control because they fear hostile retaliation. Instead, they call A.S.K.

**Written guidelines for care:** Permit applicants should first be given a caretaking packet for the respective animals they are interested in keeping to ensure that they are aware of the basic responsibilities. Basic guidelines, such as minimum coop dimensions and area of yard should be mandated in the city ordinances. We have attached detailed chicken caretaking minimum requirements here for this specific use.

**Cap number of permits in neighborhoods:** This gives the broader neighborhood some relief from having to live near farmed animals, and again, is an attempt to mitigate nuisance complaints.

**Allot for additional administrative staff and resources**

**Allot funding for capture response via All Species Kinship:** When A.S.K. is called to respond for stray farmed animals, our resources are being used. We receive calls both from the general public and dispatch currently. It remains at our discretion if we respond or not, based on availability of volunteers and time. The city currently has no response services dedicated to farmed animal capture.

Shelter hold times: "livestock" stray: Act 328 of 1976, "Animals Running at Large"

Newspaper notice-description-15 days. Arrangement with a fair grounds, or other place for temporary boarding is allowed, including private farms.

If the owner is known-then notice to person-with proof of ownership-becomes shelter property if they do not pick animal up in reasonable timeframe.

# **BASIC CHICKEN CARE INSTRUCTIONS**

## **CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE ACQUIRING A CHICKEN**

- Chickens can live as long as a dog or cat; up to 14yrs or longer
- Egg-laying for a hen generally starts at 6 months old, peaks at 18 months and declines with the development of reproductive disease.
- Laying hens have been bred to lay incessantly. Chickens in the wild lay fewer than 20 eggs a year and live to 30 years old. Contemporary laying hens lay between 300 and 350 eggs a year and develop reproductive disease which is the cause of up to 90% of mortality in egg-laying flocks beginning at the age of 2 years old. Egg yolk peritonitis is very common. Egg material ruptures from the worn out oviduct into the coelomic cavity. When a hen's laying begins to decline or cease, this is the common cause. It is a protracted and miserable death. Google "egg yolk peritonitis" and choose "images" to see what this looks like.
- For every laying hen there is a dead or abandoned rooster. Sex of chicks are not evident till over 4 months old. Google "male chicks."
- Chickens are Tropical Jungle Fowl and need serious and costly protection in Michigan's extreme hot and cold climate.

### **COST**

- Start Up costs for coop, maintenance, tools, cleaning, equipment, heating/cooling appliances, dishes, nets, food storage, scale, fencing, security locks, lighting, motion detectors, monitors, cameras, permit application (\$2-\$3,000)
- Annual supplies per bird for food, bedding, nutritional supplements, hygiene supplies, permit fee, utilities (\$300)
- Vet care per bird per service (office exam \$50-60, fecal test \$20-\$40, plus other services as needed for illness or injury). Are you able to provide the birds with proper veterinary care needed, and are you willing to drive over 30 minutes one way to reach a qualified avian vet?

### **TIME**

- Average 1 hour per bird per day minimum for cleaning, parasite control, grooming, physical exam, travel time to purchase supplies, construction, repair, medication, feeding, supervise free time out of pen.
- Chickens need to be tended to twice daily. Will you have a person ready to substitute for you when you have reason to be absent? Winter care is more time intensive.

### **SPACE**

- At least a 6'W x 12'L x 6'H space in a yard is needed for a coop and pen for 4 birds in addition to a larger fenced area for regular exercise.

### **LOCATION**

- Coop and pen should be located in an area that provides shade, direct sunlight, good drainage and protection from prevailing winds and will not present a problem to neighbors.

### **PREDATORS**

- Chickens will attract bird mites and lice, mice, yard birds, squirrels, raccoons, dogs, coyotes, fox, mink, opossum, rats, owls, bobcats, hawks, snakes, weasels, ferrets, and humans DURING ALL HOURS OF THE DAY.

## **ACQUIRING A CHICKEN**

### **ADOPTION OR PURCHASE/BREEDING?**

The recent interest in having chickens has overwhelmed animal rescue organizations with inquiries from people wanting to give up chickens who are no longer wanted. Like all other animals surrendered to shelters, rescue organizations cannot help them all. There are never enough homes for displaced animals

so adoption of birds who need homes is always the kindest choice instead of purchase from a breeder or hatchery.

## **ADOPTION**

By adopting from a rescue organization or a private individual, you can know what to expect with regard to the bird's health, sex, behavior and personality. Reputable rescue organizations can provide advice on selecting the right bird, care information and generally have a generous return policy to insure that bird will be happy, compatible and well cared for. The identification of the sex of chicks by feed stores, breeders and hatcheries is often wrong and not apparent until the bird is 6 months old. 50% of the chicks hatched are roosters who are killed or otherwise discarded of as waste. Newborn chicks shipped through the postal service are deprived of their mothers, warmth and food. The younger the bird the more fragile and difficult they are to care for.

## **PURCHASE/BREEDING**

The identification of the sex of chicks by feed stores, breeders and hatcheries is often wrong. Gender identification is most clearly determined by hatchery specialist on the first day of birth. Birds are 3-4 days old, typically, when they reach local farm stores. At this point it is anyone's best guess what the bird's gender will be. This poses a significant issue, as unwanted genders frequently get abandoned in the community.

## **HEALTHY BIRD CHECKLIST**

Eyes: clear, clean, wide open, alert

Face / comb / wattle: clean, soft, blemish free, healthy deep red indicating good blood supply, (some faces are not red)

Posture: head erect, good balance, stand or perch on both feet on extended legs, good grip on perch, facing activity

Odor: none or slightly fermented hay

Beak / nostrils: clean, uniform, shiny and solid

Legs / feet: clean, shiny, uniform scales and nails, foot bottom soft and blemish free, legs and toes straight and functional

Feathers; clean, bright, shiny, smooth or fluffy, free of mites or lice

Wings: held close to body, symmetrical, smooth movement in joints when flexed, flight feathers intact

Skin: clean, soft, pale pink and translucent (some breeds have bare red patches at shoulders and keel), free of mites or lice

Droppings: 70% odorless green/ white, firm, 30% stinky brown pasty (cecal), watery if stressed

Keel (sternum): Straight, good muscle mass on either side, lump free

Crop (on bird's right side of lower neck): full, contents of consumed food easily palpated

Vent: petite, clean, moist, soft, pliant

Respiration: 12-37 per min., inspiration louder and shorter than expiration, minimal chest movement, closed beak

## **NUMBER OF BIRDS**

Calculating available space, time, and cost (see above) will dictate how many birds can be properly cared for:

**coop:** 4 sq. feet of floor space minimum per bird for the interior (an area 2 ft. x 2 ft. per bird)

**pen:** 10 sq. ft of floor space minimum per bird (an area 3 ft. x 3.3 ft per bird)

range/ exercise yard: 174 sq. ft per bird (an area about 10 ft. x 17 ft per bird)

A single chicken is a sad chicken. Plan to have at least 2- they are flock animals and need the companionship of other chickens. Generally, 3-5 compatible chickens can be well maintained in a typical city environment. Individual bird's sex, age and temperament can affect compatibility. Over-crowding chickens is the most common mistake. Hens should outnumber roosters. Sometimes single birds can thrive with a human friend if they have special needs. Roosters, single or in pairs, are very sociable and

can make terrific companions if handled gently and often.

## **HANDLING & RESTRAINT**

Never handle a chicken by wings, feet or legs. Herd bird to corner using slow deliberate movement. Fast = predator, slow = less threat. Place hands over top part of wings (shoulders) and hold securely but do not squeeze. Pick up and hold under arm to keep wings in place. Support feet with other hand if bird will tolerate. To restrain for transport or examination, drape a towel over shoulders cape style and wrap around body.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Consider travel time and avoid extreme weather conditions. Heat exhaustion can develop quickly, interior car temps can reach fatal point 10 minutes. Medium sized hard pet carriers work well for security, safety, stress. Line with a towel, shredded paper or straw. Food is a good stress reducer. Offer wet food like greens or cucumber for long trips.

## **ARRIVAL**

If other birds are already present, a 2 week minimum quarantine in a separate area is recommended to watch for signs of illness and parasites. Avoid noisy, high traffic areas and allow the bird to acclimate before introducing to other birds, animals and family.

## **PROVIDING A GOOD HOME**

### **NATURAL HISTORY**

It is important to understand how chickens live in the wild and to provide them with an environment that meets those instinctive physical and psychological needs as closely as possible. Chickens are all descended from Tropical Jungle Fowl are adapted to living in a natural habitat that is spacious, richly vegetated, diverse and warm. This presents a particular challenge in a small urban setting in a cold climate like Minnesota.

Flocks have a highly developed social structure and depend on each for companionship and security. Naturalists have observed that they can recognize and remember 180 other individual flock members. They are ground dwelling birds. Most are capable of low flight in short distances, smaller birds can fly higher and farther.

In the wild they roost in trees at dusk before they sleep or to escape predators. They hide their nests in cavities in the ground. The majority of their waking hours are spent active, wide ranging, grazing, and foraging for food- plants, bugs and occasionally small rodents. In their natural state. They typically travel 1/2 mile from their roost each day. In the wild, they are never over crowded- if the population becomes too dense, members will break off into subgroups and spread out. They move on from one area to another which allows food sources to regenerate and their waste is not concentrated in one place and it can decompose without health risk to the flock.

Roosters alert the flock to danger, find food and call the hens to it and stand guard as they eat. They select and build nests and will even participate in caring for the young. They also act as peace keepers to intervene in disputes that can develop between flock members. Roosters will start to crow and display courting behaviors at about 6 months of age. It is essential to gently handle a rooster on a daily basis to establish that you are the flock leader (Alpha) and maintain a well socialized companion.

The hens spend their time scratching for food, dust bathing, preening, playing and napping. Hens begin to lay eggs at about 6 months of age. Hen in the wild produce only a few clutches of eggs a year for the sole purpose of reproduction. Domesticated hens have been bred to lay one egg a day but by 18 month of age, egg laying frequency generally diminishes and many adult or senior hens stop laying altogether.

Chickens are sociable, cheerful and intelligent creatures who can form lifelong bonds with each other and



other species including humans, dogs and cats. Because of their keen intelligence and instinctive physical activity, they need a stimulating environment that mimics as much as possible the rich and diverse world nature designed them to enjoy.

## **COOP, PEN, RANGE/ EXERCISE YARD**

Housing and infrastructure

*"The primary purpose of poultry housing is to protect flocks against adverse weather and predators (coyote, fox, stray dogs, raccoons and raptors). Weather is of critical concern in the Upper Midwest, where summers can be extremely hot and winters bitterly cold. Housing must provide shade from sun and cover from rain. It must be able to withstand high winds and snow loads if it is to be used for year-round operation. These basic housing considerations apply to all poultry."*

**-Poultry Your Way: A Guide to Management Alternatives for the Upper Midwest", Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 2005**

**COOP:** The house, closed structure or enclosed room which provides shelter from cold, heat, wind, rain, snow and predators for protected roosting, nesting, feeding and watering space.

**Construction & Materials:** Coops can be purchased pre-made or in kits, constructed within an existing structure or built from scratch. Local building codes should be followed to prevent damage from snow, wind, etc. NOTE: rabbit hutches, plastic igloos, dog houses, barrels, etc. are not appropriate structures.

### **Required Features**

**Size:** 4 sq. feet of floor space minimum is required per bird for the interior (an area 2 ft. x 2 ft. per bird).

EX: 4 birds will need a coop with at least 4 feet x 4 feet inside floor space not including nest boxes.

Outside dimensions should be about 5 feet by 5 feet x 6 ft. high. Overcrowding is the most common cause of behavior problems, injury and disease. Coop should be high enough for a human to stand up comfortably for cleaning, maintenance and egg collection. It also allows for additional roosting.

Temperament and social structures should be taken into account, and partitions should be available for birds who are sick, injured or lower in the pecking order. Access to electricity is required in free standing structures.

**Floor:** The floor should not collect and hold moisture, be easy to clean, retain heat in cold weather and exclude rodents/predators. A dirt floor draws heat away and is not easy to clean or rodents/predators proof. A wood floor is adequate provided it is at least a foot off the ground, insulated and sealed properly but is difficult to sanitize because it is porous. A concrete floor is ideal since it discourages rodents/predators and is easy to sanitize. Regardless of the floor type, bedding strewn on the surface is needed to absorb moist fecal matter and facilitate cleaning. Leaves, wood shavings or straw work best and can be composted or easily bagged and disposed of as solid waste.

**Walls:** Materials that are resistant to moisture and mold and easily cleaned are best. Chemically treated materials should be nontoxic. A good compound with anti-fungal agents is good for humid areas. Clear varnish is also good. Everything should be treated or painted before it is assembled. Wooden structures should be draft free and built with double walls that have at least 1 1/2 inch insulated layer between them.

**Roof:** The coop roof should be made of a material that will not collect and hold heat and should be built with double walls that have at least 1 1/2 inch insulated layer between them. The roof surfaced should be covered with an insulating tar paper to protect from heavy rains. The roof should be slightly inclined, to allow water to run off and if it overhangs at the front wall it will protect from downpours. A few small openings along the eaves allow moisture to escape and provide fresh air.

**Doors:** One human-size door is needed for daily access. Doors for chickens should be just large enough for the largest bird and can be positioned anywhere from ground level to about 2 feet high with a stable ramp with cleats. Chickens are ground dwellers, not parrots-small doors at heights greater than 3 feet with flimsy, unstable ladders are not appropriate. Doors must be able to be secured against predators at night.

**Windows:** Chickens love windows and need natural light. Double glaze for warmth. Cover with 1/2" metal screen so they can be opened for ventilation in hot weather. Allow one square foot of window for each 10 square foot of floor space.

**Roosts:** Lumber or branches can be used. They should be strong enough and mounted securely enough to hold all birds. The surface should be rough for good grip with no splinters or sharp edges. For medium sized birds, 2" or 4 "flat or 1 1/2" diameter is best for foot comfort. The longer roost the better to prevent competition. They should be set 18" from wall, 2 -3 feet off the floor. If mounted higher, rung steps are needed spaced 8-12 inches apart. The addition of a dropping board underneath and elevated roost will collect droppings and keep floor space below clean and inhabitable.

**Climate:** "Shelters should be kept at a comfortable temperature for the animals. "Minimum Temperature 55°(f), maximum temperature 70°(F)" -Poultry Your Way: A Guide to Management Alternatives for the Upper Midwest", Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 2005

The coop should be heated to maintain a temperature above 32 degrees during the coldest part of the winter and cooled below 85 in the hottest part of the summer. Below 32 degrees birds are uncomfortable and cannot maintain body temperature. Below 15 degrees frostbite begins, and hypothermia increases. Oil or water filled safety heaters (i.e. brands Pelonis, DeLonghi, Honeywell) are completely closed and sealed systems that run on electricity. The oil is heated from within and the heat is radiant so there are no exposed heating elements that create dangerous problems even if they tip over. Heat lamps should only be used with extreme caution and be firmly attached at least 3 feet from animals and far from any flammable item, especially dry straw or bedding. Smoke alarms are highly recommended. Extra bedding should be available to keep animals warm and comfortable in cold seasons. Between 75 and 85 degrees, panting and dehydration begin, above 85 heat stress and danger of heat prostration increases.

**Ventilation:** Doors, windows and vents near the ceiling supply oxygen, remove heat from breathing, remove moisture from breath and droppings, harmful gasses and dust particles, and dilute disease causing airborne organisms. Fans should be provided for hottest weather.

**Light:** Natural light from windows and/or skylights is required. Can be supplemented with full spectrum incandescent light to follow normal seasonal light cycles and for cleaning and maintenance. The minimum light intensity you should provide should be enough to clearly see the hens feed when standing over the feeder.

**Feeders:** Food receptacles should be made of non-corrosive material that is easily cleaned minimizes spillage, prevents contamination with droppings and keeps food dry. The containers should be large enough for all the birds to comfortably eat at once or numerous enough to prevent competition or intimidation. Large heavy rubber feed buckets work nicely. Hanging dishes or feeders work as well and should be hung at about the level of the bird's back. If dishes are outside the coop, they should be set under an overhang to keep them dry when it rains.

**Waterers:** Water receptacles should be made of non-corrosive material that can be cleaned and disinfected with a solution of chlorine bleach, prevent contamination with droppings and is spill and leak proof. The containers should be large enough for all the birds to comfortably drink at once and hold enough water for all birds for an entire day. They should be slightly positioned higher than the feeder or far enough away to prevent contamination with food.

**Nestboxes:** One nest box for every 3 hens. A 12"W x 12"D x 14"H is most versatile. Chickens prefer wooden nest boxes with covered opening for privacy placed on or as low to the floor as possible. If set higher they require a perch in front of the opening. They should be filled with 2-4 inches of straw, litter or grass. They prefer to nest in the South East corner of the structure whenever possible.

## **PEN**

The fenced area surrounding the coop that provides secure access to exercise, sunlight, earth and vegetation and is freely available to the birds when they are unsupervised. It is constructed to prevent the bird's escape and prevents entry by intruders/predators.

**Construction & Materials:** Kennel pens can be purchased pre-made, in kits, or built from scratch. Menards sells kennel panels individually allowing the builder to have more creativity during construction. Local building codes should be followed to prevent damage from snow, wind, etc. Temperament and social structures of flock should be taken into account, and partitions should be available for birds who are sick, injured or lower in the pecking order.

### **Required Features**

**Size:** 10 sq. ft of floor space minimum per bird (an area 3 ft. x 3.3 ft per bird) is required, so 4 birds will need floor space of at least 6 feet x 7 feet. If the coop is adjacent to the pen at least a 6 x 12 foot space in a yard is needed. If the coop is elevated 2 feet so the chickens can use the space underneath, the coop and pen can occupy some, but not all, of the same footprint. If most of the pen is in deep shade all of the time it would be conducive to unhealthy bacteria and fungal development. The pen should be high enough for you to stand up comfortably for cleaning, maintenance, capture and also allows for additional roosting.

**Substrate:** Choose a well-drained area. Substrate material for the pen should be clean, non-toxic, biodegradable, readily available, inexpensive and replaceable. Since it will become compacted from little feet and contaminated by concentrated droppings and parasites, it will need to be raked out and replaced frequently to reduce odor and fly activity. Play sand, leaves, municipal wood chips, sod and hard wearing ground cover work well.

**Metal Fencing / Predator Control:** Most conflicts in neighborhoods occur due to lacking attention to predator protection. The type of fencing depends on what the most likely predators are in your area. In Michigan: dogs, rats, raccoons, mink, weasels, hawks, fox and coyotes are the most prevalent in city neighborhoods. It's best to build the strongest deterrents possible before problems exist. Chain link panels or welded or woven fencing on a sturdy frame reinforced at the bottom with small mesh metal wire that prevents predators from tunneling under the fence will discourage most intruders. Fencing should be dug beneath ground level and aproned inward at least 1 foot. Overhanging shrubs and trees should be trimmed to prevent predators from climbing on them, and into the enclosure. Regular inspection is key to security. The average 4ft fenced, backyard is not sufficient to prevent raccoons, or entry by most other wildlife. Fence height extensions can be made to help add some protection.

**Gate:** A gate is needed for easy human access.

**Cover:** Pen should be covered to keep birds in and predators out. The type of covering needed will depend on the type of predators. Covering part of the pen with a roof such as corrugated fiberglass can provide shade and rain shelter.

**Windbreak:** Providing a wind and snow break will give the birds a protected area to be outdoors even in winter.

**Shade:** Shade must be available and can be provided by vegetation or strategically placed materials.

**Dustbath:** Taking a dust bath is the closest thing to heaven for a chicken. They derive pleasure and contentment by bathing in the sun and in loose dry soil depressions in the dirt which cleans their feathers and rids them of parasites. Birds will usually dig their own hole for dust baths. Keep the soil in the dust bath loose and add play sand if it is a heavy clay soil. Adding a little poultry dust, diatomaceous earth or wood ash increases the effectiveness of parasite control, but may not be sufficient alone, for parasite

control. Large heavy rubber feed buckets filled with play sand are a welcome addition to the indoor coop in the winter.

**Enrichment Furnishings:** There is nothing sadder than a barren pen when compared to the rich jungle environment chickens evolved in. Lots of large branches, stumps or platforms provide places to go and things to do and look natural and attractive in the pen. Include bushes, boxes or other objects to sit in or hide behind. Plant kale or other safe, edible vegetation around the outside of the pen for forage. Overcrowding, boredom and barren pens are the most common cause of behavior problems.

## **RANGE/ EXERCISE YARD**

The larger fenced area like a backyard that provides ample space for safe exercise, forage, sunlight, earth and vegetation that is regularly available to the birds when supervised.

For regular exercise, 174 sq. ft per bird (an area about 10 ft. x 17 ft per bird) is required. 4 birds will need access to a 40 ft. x 70 ft. fenced area in the yard. If there is no access to a larger Range/ exercise yard, 16 sq. ft. of floor space minimum per bird (an area 4 ft. x 4 ft per bird) in the pen must be provided.

**Fencing:** 6 ft privacy fencing prevents or to discourage uninvited human or animal visitors and promotes the safety and security of the birds and neighbors.

**Nontoxic Plants:** Chickens are inquisitive and voracious eaters of vegetation and many ornamental garden plants can be toxic to them. Learn which of your plants might be harmful and fence them off or better yet replace them with safe and nutritious plants.

**Security:** Chickens are susceptible to theft, vandalism and predators and need to be securely shut in the coop at night. The coop needs to be properly constructed to ensure proper ventilation throughout the year. Security cameras, lights and baby monitors are also highly recommended deterrents.

## **PROVIDING GOOD CARE**

### **FOOD / WATER**

Fresh food and water are required daily and should be available at all times. Hay, grain and prepared feed should be fresh- less than one year old and free of mold, insects or other contaminants. Daily intake should include: 60% nutritionally balanced prepared feed appropriate for age of bird, 20% scratch (cracked corn, oats, black oil sunflower seeds, milo, barley) 20% fresh (nutritious foods and table scraps- Caution toxic: onion, avocados, chocolate) Supplements: oyster shell or limestone for calcium, granite grit for digestion, mineral salt or ground salt licks. Chickens drink 1-2 cups of water a day.

Feed should be stored in rodent proof containers in a cool dry area inaccessible to animals. Stored feedbags should be rotated to ensure that feed is always fresh. Food that is uneaten or spilled should be removed from animal enclosures daily.

A.S.K. recommends the use of foods that do not encourage fast growth or egg-laying. High quality Roudybush is a staple maintenance diet, in crumble form, for pet chickens.

### **SOCIAL NEEDS**

Temperament and social structures of animals should be taken into account, and separate areas provided for incompatible birds. Trying to rehome birds that do not get along is unrealistic under most circumstances.

### **VET CARE**

Locate a veterinary clinic nearby that will see chickens before one is needed, preferably one that specializes in avian care. A.S.K. recommends Cedar Creek Vet Clinic in Williamston, Michigan for advanced avian veterinary care, including diagnosis and reproductive-related surgeries. Minor abrasions and infections may be seen on a limited basis at Lakeview Vet Clinic in Battle Creek.

Have an isolation area or roomy carrier and heating pad for sick or injured birds. Critical/emergency first aid supplies should be kept including roll gauze, gauze pads, tape, vet wrap, blood stop powder, antibiotic ointment, antibacterial scrub and solution, and bandage scissors.

## **SANITATION**

Manure and wet bedding should be removed from coop and animal feeding and lounging areas daily. Thorough, complete cleaning of walls and perches, removal of all bedding, and disinfecting of coop and furnishings should be done at least once a year. Keeping shelter areas clean and dry will help prevent bacteria, fungi, insects, rodents, etc. Rodent levels will be minimized by keeping all feed in rodent proof containers and removing spilled or uneaten food promptly. Litter can be double bagged and disposed of as solid waste or composted but must be done in an area where chickens will not scratch for at least a year. Housing animals in spacious, clean and relatively dust free environments will keep them healthy and will minimize human exposure to infectious disease.

## **Sources:**

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