



# BUILDING YOUR FIRST CHICKEN COOP

Everything You Didn't Know to Ask

John White | [ChickenCoopGuides.com](http://ChickenCoopGuides.com)



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*“Regard it just as  
desirable to build a  
chicken house as it is to  
build a cathedral.”*

*— Frank Lloyd Wright*

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Cover Photo: The Original Dorking Chicken Coop

<http://www.notonthehighstreet.com/>



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# Why Raise Chickens in the First Place?

People raise chickens for many reasons, including:

- For the eggs
- For the meat
- For the ornamentation and atmosphere (Bed & Breakfast businesses who have a rural or rustic atmosphere, Hobby Farmers etc)
- For pets
- For pest control (Certain breeds of chickens are excellent mousers and will keep mice and rat populations down. Aggressive breeds will even kill snakes!)
- For a hobby
- For relaxation
- To sell the eggs and meat for income
- For breeding and selling to other people who want to raise chickens
- For company
- Preppers—In anticipation of the end of the world — wanting to have a food source
- Health reasons (they want to control the way their meat and eggs are raised)
- To save money on groceries (eggs and chicken)
- Chemical free bug and weed control
- To create the world's best fertilizer

There are probably even more reasons, but those are the primary ones. Chickens can also become a reason to meet your neighbors, in either a positive or not so positive way if you neglect to inform them of your small flock.

Before you start building a chicken coop and ordering chickens there are a few things you need to do first:

**Decide Why You Want Chickens.** Raising chickens for pets requires a different mindset and setup than raising chickens to sell, or to meet your own food needs. If you're raising chickens for your own needs you may only need 8-to-12, whereas raising them for commercial uses may mean having 50-to-100. Most of us have something that sparks our desire to raise chickens. Maybe you've been given, or bought some farm fresh eggs. The taste wowed you so much you decided to raise chickens so you could have fresh eggs every day.

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***Ken Poindexter and Wendy Broughman*** of Charlotte, North Carolina took coop building seriously. These first time builders created a seriously luxurious coop for their five hens.

Maybe you're tired of paying high prices for eggs and meat, or you're concerned about what's "going into the eggs and meat" you're eating. By raising your own chickens you know what they're eating and ultimately what you're eating.

You may have noticed a need or demand in your area for fresh eggs and free-range chicken and have decided to become a small commercial chicken farmer.

You might not like the idea of selling eggs and meat as much as breeding and raising the chickens and selling the baby chicks or fertile eggs.

Maybe you want to do a little of everything: sell some chickens and eggs, have a few special hens as pets, and harvest your own eggs and meat for your family.

If you live in a rural area, or have a garden, you know how quickly a bug infestation can take over. There is no better bug control than hungry chickens. Turn them loose in your garden and they'll make short work of any pests, bugs, grubs and insects destroying or feeding on your fresh vegetables.

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*(Left) Iowa Blue and (Right) Golden Laced Wyandotte (front, back is Java)*

Chickens, believe it or not, are also good mousers. They love meat as much as any dog or cat and will kill and eat mice, rats, snakes, moles and even small cats if threatened. If you have a woodpile you know that such piles are wildlife habitats for mice, who then attract snakes and pose a danger to your family. Free-range chickens will, in time, greatly reduce or often even eliminate any mice, rodent, bug or snake problems around your woodpile.

Maybe you like having animals around, but don't have a lot of time to care for them properly. You're looking for a low-maintenance pet that will also be attentive and personable. The right breed of chicken will make a great pet. Many are affectionate, come when called, will follow you around and sit on your lap and seek attention, but can also be left to their own devices to forage and take care of themselves without a lot of attention. And, they earn their keep—keeping down the pest population and giving you fresh eggs.

Knowing why you want chickens will help you decide what kind of coop you need.

Things you may not know about chickens. As low maintenance as chickens generally are, they do come with a set of issues many people fail to take into account when buying them. As with any animal you own you'll be responsible for:

- Feeding and watering
- Health care
- Manure cleanup

Unless your hens have the run of a large farm and only roost in the woods, you're going to be cleaning up chicken poop.

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Chickens, like most animals, are miniature poop factories. They poop inside and outside their coop and their poop attracts flies and rodents. The best way to deal with this reality is to keep a clean coop and run. To make cleaning easier, faster and less smelly, use animal bedding such as wood pellets, pine shavings sawdust, sand or even kitty litter in your coop.

Straw and hay doesn't work for the same reason it wouldn't work if you put it in a cat litter box, it doesn't absorb the manure or liquids; bedding does absorb. It not only absorbs, it keeps the smell down and the flies away.

Best of all, just like with cat litter you can scoop out the used litter and leave the clean. And, if you use organic or biodegradable bedding you can compost it.

**Decide if you have enough room for chickens.** Each hen will need a minimum amount of 2-3 square feet inside the coop for roosting, and another 5-to-10 square feet per bird for the outdoor run, unless you are fortunate enough to have enough room for your chickens to be full time free-range birds as opposed to letting them run around the backyard when you're there with them, or while you're cleaning the coop.

Chickens need room and space to be chickens. And you need room away from them, their smell and odors (even clean chickens have a fragrance on a hot summer day) so your home doesn't smell like a barnyard when the windows are open and the wind shifts just right.

Be sure to account for the distance (at least 20-feet) from the coop to your home, and from your manure storage to your home. Honestly consider if you have an area where the chickens can roam around at least part of the day while you're there or not.

This gives you a chance to clean the coop without upsetting or working around them, and gives them a chance to stretch their legs and find some tasty bugs and natural grit (small rocks or sand they ingest to help them digest their food).

**Decide on Free Range or Confined.** Free Range means your chickens have the run of your property. They roam around your yard and land at will, but come home to roost in their chicken coop at night. More space for ranging is better, especially if you want to add additional chickens in the future.

Free-range chickens get a greater variety of bugs and pests in their diet, making them better tasting and healthier. You'll still need to supplement their diet with chicken feed, but you'll use a lot less feed when they're foraging.

Not all breeds of chickens are able to forage. For a list of breeds and their qualities or personalities read the ebook, "How to Choose the Ideal Chicken Breed for Your Flock," by John White.

Free-range chickens don't require as much chicken feed from you since they're able to forage for themselves. If you're going to raise free-range chickens it's a good idea to put refuges around your property they can run into in case of an attack by a predator.

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However, many chickens do just as well, or better, while confined. They're also less likely to be the victim of predators such as raccoons, dogs, hawks, foxes, badgers, opossums and other creatures.

Confined chickens spend the vast majority of their day in a pen, or coop (5-to10 square feet of space per hen) and do not roam, or roam around free only infrequently.

They do little foraging and eat primarily chicken feed and whatever you put in their feeder. Some chicken breeds do well in confinement, other breeds do not. Decide which way you plan to raise your chickens so you can make sure you get a breed that does well in confinement.

Before you order your chickens, build your coop or plan your future farming chickens, you definitely need to know if you have enough room for the breed you choose, and you need to know whether you plan to confine your flock or let them roam so you know how large to build your coop.



*Metal chicken tractor (note the wheels for moving)*

### **How many chickens should you get?**

The ideal size backyard flock is about 3-to-4 chickens. Chickens are social animals and don't do well by themselves. Two is the absolute minimum you should have, but 3-to-4 is ideal for a small space or city flock. If space is at a premium, consider getting Bantam chickens—half the size of full-size birds, but still good for eggs and meat. The number of chickens you get depends a lot on what you intend to do with them too.

**Is it legal to own chickens in your city?** Laws vary from city-to-city and even county to county regarding owning chickens as livestock versus owning them as “pets” and in some areas with covenants or a home owner's association, owning chickens for any reason is illegal. Where chickens are legal to raise cities will still require that any size chicken coop be located at least 20-feet from any occupied residence. Some cities allow chickens, but outlaw roosters. You don't need a rooster to get eggs, but you do need one if you want to breed chickens.

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What Does the Zoning Office Say? Your local zoning office may be just fine with the fact you have chickens, but have additional restrictions concerning the size (square footage) and height of your chicken coop. Many people build coops they can roll around their yard, while others like something more permanent. Check before you build and get any necessary permits before you build.

### **What Kind of Materials Do You Want to Use?**

Wood is the first choice for most Do-it-yourselfers simply because it's easy to work with, it's cheap, and it's durable. Others use plastic, canvas, tarps or abandoned vehicles—any combination of material, from sheet iron to tin will work. It's mostly a matter of finding plans and material you are comfortable and capable of working with.

People have made chicken coops out of plastic composting bins, crates, pallets, doghouses, trash cans, wooden barrels, and whatever strikes their creative skill set. There are even chicken coops made out of straw bale and recycled bottles. You're only limited by your imagination!

### **Permanent Coop or Tractor?**

Depending on your space, the number of chickens you have, and how adverse you are to cleaning up the chicken coop every week, you may opt to build or buy a "chicken tractor."

A chicken tractor is simply a mobile chicken coop with no floor. It can be wheeled from place to place to allow the chickens to forage from within the confines of the coop and feed on bugs, insects, weeds and grass while pooping on the ground—which then becomes fertilizer. Plus, you don't have to sift, clean or replace the bedding. You just pick up the coop, or hitch it to your car or truck, and roll it to another area every few days.

Chicken tractors can be made of aluminum, PVC pipe or wood. Remember, they must be light enough to lift.

### **How Much Will It Cost to Have Your Own Backyard Flock?**

People who think they're going to save thousands of dollars on food bills by having chickens haven't counted the cost of:

- Feed
- Medical care
- Feeders
- Water bowl
- Heating unit or lamps
- Building a coop
- Buying chicks

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- Supplements (like calcium)
- Mealworms
- Grit (small rocks that chickens eat to help them digest their food)
- Cleaners
- Sand, pine shavings, straw or coop bedding material
- Compost pile and shovel or pitchfork for turning compost
- Wheelbarrow or buckets for transporting manure to compost pile

The cost of your setup depends on how frugal, thrifty and creative you are. You can get free chickens from people wanting to thin their flock, or even from people who got chicks for Easter and now that they've grown into chickens, they no longer want them.

Coops can be made from boxes and wood and containers you have on hand. See The City Chicken or ChickenCoopGuides.com for dozens of photos of creative containers people have turned into coops for little or no money, or for different plans you can download to build your own coop.

### **Feed:**

The more your chickens are allowed to forage, the less feed you'll have to give them. (Get a breed of chicken known for its foraging or they may starve.) Chickens also do well on table scraps. The amount of feed you'll need depends on how many chickens you have and whether they are standard/large breeds, or bantam (smaller version of the breed).

Some owners set out grasshopper traps and grow their own grains for their flocks. If you buy feed (usually cracked corn or wheat), a 50 pound bag of chicken feed costs about \$15. You'll also have to buy bowls, feeders, water system, a heater and lamp for warming the coop's water supply, and other items related to feed. Prices for each item range from \$9.95 to \$40. If you're like most chicken owners you'll soon learn how much chickens adore meal worms and you'll find yourself buying them as well.

### **Chicks:**

If you can get your chickens from a friend or other source for free, you're lucky! If you buy your chicks (cheaper than buying adults), they'll cost you from \$4 each up to the hundreds of dollars each for novelty or specialty breeds.

If you're new to raising chickens, skip the egg hatching and the chicks and buy juvenile hens who haven't matured yet, but are hardier than baby chicks.

Juvenile chicks lay faster and are less likely to get sick and cost you vet fees too. They'll cost about \$25 to \$30 each, but they're well worth the cost. You'll spend that

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much in raising a chick (feed etc) to juvenile stage. Make sure you buy females, not males. An experienced chicken sexer can tell which chicks are male, which are female.

**Coops:**

Coops can cost you a few dozen dollars, up to \$500 or \$1,000 or more depending on how elaborate your coop is, and on whether you buy it or build it yourself. If you buy all new materials it will cost you more than if you scavenge your materials and use items you already have on hand. It all depends on what you want your coop to look like.

**Medical:**

Chickens are like any animal—they are susceptible to diseases, viruses, colds and parasites and from time-to-time they'll need to go to the vet, or risk infecting your entire flock. Medical costs are a given as chicks will need their shots and care from time-to-time. The more they're allowed to free range and the less stressed and better care they receive, the healthier they are.

**Cleaning:**

One of the costs many chicken farmers don't take into account is the cost of bedding. Many people use sand, others use pine shavings, pellets or even cat litter. Whatever you use and however much it costs (\$4 US to \$8 US per 20 pound bag) it's an ongoing expense. You will always need to clean and reline your coop with bedding if you want to keep disease, flies, smells and rodents away. If you don't buy bedding, you'll end up paying in other ways.

**Equipment:**

Another cost many people overlook is the startup costs of bowls, feeders, units that water and feed their flock (even if you make them yourself, you'll still have to invest in parts and buckets). Costs can range from \$9.95 US to \$39 and up depending on the device and the number of them. Prepare to buy or make watering units and feeding units. If you live in a cold zone you'll need to insulate your coop and/or install either heating or a heat lamp that will keep your hens from getting frostbit combs and claws, or getting ill.

You'll need buckets, and/or a wheelbarrow for moving manure (depending on how many chickens you have); a compost pile to put soiled bedding and manure and scraps or leaves to ensure the compost cooks and breaks down.

Plan on buying a shovel or small rake and pitchfork for turning the compost.

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You'll want, if not need, rubber boots for walking around the chicken coop and rubber gloves and a face mask (cloth is fine) for cleaning. You may want to invest in a high powered spray nozzle for your garden hose for those times you want to really clean out the coop.

If you're selling eggs, unless you have people bring their own cartons, or you charge to provide them, you'll need to invest in egg cartons.

### **Summary:**

Expect to take about a year or two of raising chickens to simply recoup or break even on what you invested in your chickens. Most people spend between \$300 and \$3,000 establishing a small flock—again, based on how elaborate they want to be, and how many chickens they start out with.

While no one expense, outside of building the coop, is huge, a lot of little expenses can add up. Any extra animal or hobby will bring added expenses. But it's important to



*Chicken tractors that can be moved around on large tracts of land help cut down on the cost of bedding and food by allowing chickens to forage, and to poop directly onto the land. They must be moved regularly to ensure a clean foraging area and no over deposit of manure.*

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know if your budget can handle the cost before you start. With the right preparation and awareness it almost always is.

It's also entirely possible to start a flock of 3-to-4 hens in a homemade coop for under \$50. Don't let price scare you away. It's better to start small, get the feel for what you're doing and learn on a flock of 3-to-8 hens and then expand rather than be overwhelmed with 20-to-50 birds all at once, unless of course, you really like a challenge!

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# Housing Your Chicks:

## Building Your Own Coop vs. Buying a Kit

There's an awful lot to be said for building your own coop, especially if you're handy with tools and can get your hands on a set of good plans.

You can create a one-of-a-kind coop to match your home or blend into the environment, and you can also create a coop that meets your unique needs for cleaning, feeding and egg collecting.

If you have the skill set, or have a friend or family member that does, just sit down with paper and pen and design away! You'll need to create a cut list and go buy the wood, or perhaps find a plan that you can use adapt or expand on. But that's part of the fun of building your own coop.

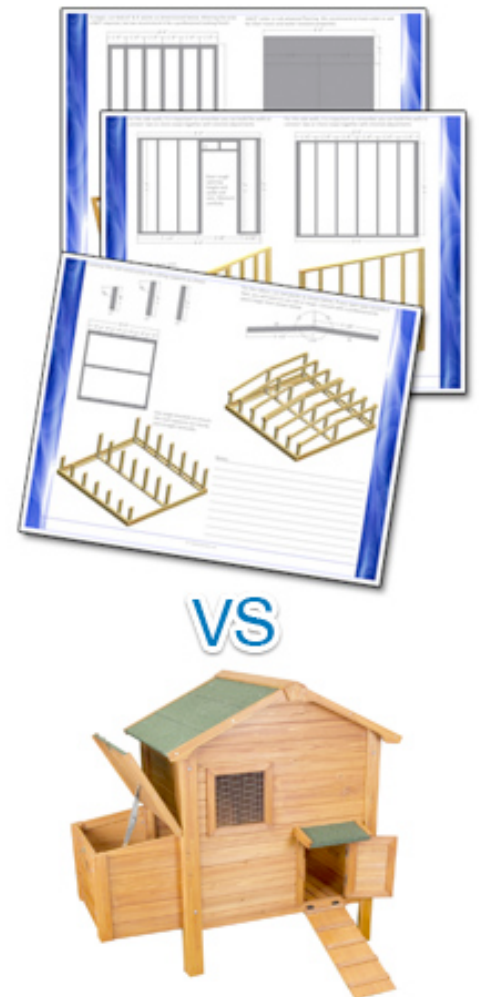
If you don't have the skill set to design a coop, but are comfortable with basic carpentry skills (hammering, sawing, nailing and screwing) then find a set of plans and pick one you like. Sites like <http://chickencoopguides.com>

have a variety of free and paid plans to choose from as well as other offerings like books on selecting the best breed(s) for your flock—all included in the one low fee (less than \$50) that gives you access to 19 plans, video forums, photos and more.

On the other hand, buying a kit takes the work out of deciding how much wood you have to have. You don't have to worry about cutting it the right way and figuring out all the wood you'll need.

Kits are generally less expensive, come with all the parts you need already cut, and can usually be assembled in a weekend and be ready to paint or stain without much hassle. With the right kit, you know what it's going to look like before you start building, and it's already been tested and built, so it's structurally sound.

One strong warning. Look at kits before you buy. The wood in kits is usually cheap and won't hold up as well or as long as wood you'd select yourself from a local lumber yard. There are differences between buying a kit and buying a plan, and buying a plan is definitely the better way to go.



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## **Buying the Plans for Building Your Own Coop**

There are a lot of advantages of building a coop from your own design, or better yet, from a professionally designed plan:

- A professional plan is a blueprint for the average layperson. It gives dimensions, details and specific instructions on how to assemble your coop. A kit only tells you to “Nail part A to part B.
- You know best what materials you have to work with. A plan tells you how things go together and suggests the kinds of wood to use, but you’re free to use oak or birch instead of pine if you want to. You don’t get that option in a kit. You use what comes with the kit.
- When you buy a plan you’ll save money using found materials and wood you already have.
- When you buy a plan, you can alter your design as you go along, making it larger or smaller to personalize it if you want.
- You’ll get the perfect coop because you’re in control of what it looks like.
- When you buy a plan you know it will fit your space and environment because you’ve selected it based on your needs.
- When you buy a plan you build the kind of coop you need for your flock.

## **Buying a Kit**

- Unless you buy a quality kit from a reputable company, the quality of the kit is not as good (wood, construction etc) as if you selected the wood and cut it yourself. Kits often contain cheap, flimsy wood that falls apart quickly and is put together poorly. You’ll still have to sand, finish, paint, stain and work with the wood in a kit just as you would with any lumber you purchased yourself. There’s no real advantage to buying a kit over buying a plan.
- You have to actually read the directions if you buy a kit and want it to go together without pieces left over.
- Even with a kit you still have to assemble the pieces, nail the parts and hope that everything fits. If a part is broken, cracked or missing, you still have to go to the lumberyard for a replacement.

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## Coop Design — Critical Must Have Features

While there are dozens of fun, whimsical and downright funky designs for chicken coops, at the end of the day you still have to:

- be able to easily access it for cleaning
- be able to easily access the nesting boxes to retrieve eggs
- be able to secure it at night to protect your flock
- be able to add food, water
- be able to heat or cool it as the weather requires
- be able to provide shelter from rain and snow
- be able to keep out all predators, including ferrets, rats, snakes, dogs, cats, hawks (overhead predators), raccoons and opossums and whatever wildlife that poses a threat in your area

Coop design is a lot like building a small shed on the outside, but there are other features inside you need to consider, including security as well as comfort.

Your chickens need security against outside creatures: like raccoons, foxes, coyotes, dogs, cats, opossums, mice, rats, snakes and bears (in some areas). But they also need protection against predators who ignore wire, latches and doors. These are predators like mites, bacteria, viruses and diseases. You keep them at bay through keeping the inside and outside of your chicken coops clean.

You'll also need to ensure that your hens enjoy a stress free home so they'll lay lots of eggs, stay healthy and produce great tasting meat or make great pets.

Features like nesting boxes where your hens will lay their eggs so you can collect them easily. Features like roosting benches that are not only comfortable for the hens, but accessible.

If you opt to build your own coop, take time to look at designs and at what other people have created.

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*They may be cute, but predators are the number cause of chicken deaths.*



These are the “must have” features your coop (no matter how large or small) has to have to function:

- 
- Roosting pole (tree limbs, dowels, 2x4 lumber) (poles should be wide enough that the chicken’s claws do not curl over the side. 2x4’s laid flat with the 4” width seem to work well, but wider is okay too.
- Predator-proof from all sides and top and bottom too. Predators will dig under a coop to reach a chicken and raccoons will actually reach through chicken wire to tear up your flock. Use one-half inch square “hardware cloth” instead to cover all windows and openings.
- Predator proofed floors (rodents like squirrels, mice, rats will be attracted to the feed and the chicken droppings and will dig or slip under the edges of the coop if they aren’t secured. If you have a permanent coop you need to bury small mesh fencing around your coop—a depth of 12-inches is usually sufficient if you don’t put the coop on a concrete pad
- Waterproof roof. No rain or water should be able to drip or blow in.
- Cleaning access and easy to clean. Bacteria, fungi and other things not good for chickens or humans easily build up if the coop is not cleaned regularly. One of the things chicken owners fear most are mites, which thrive in dirty chicken coops. Make sure you select a design or coop that is easy to clean. If it is

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difficult or hard to clean you'll be less likely to clean it as often as it needs cleaning.

- Feeding access so you can easily add feed and remove molded, wet or old feed
- Room for every bird to roost. Chickens need at least 2-to-4 inches width of roost to sleep on. Round the edges so they don't cut their feet on sharp edges. If you opt for using tree branches, sand down any sharp points or places where they could hurt their feet. Give each hen 5-to-10 inches of roosting space side-to-side and at least 10-inches between poles or "roosts" if you need more than one roost. If you have more than one roost, put each additional roost 3-to-6 inches higher than the one in front of it so the roosts are staggered, like steps on a ladder, and the hens are sleeping directly behind each other.
- Good ventilation. Chickens are prone to respiratory illnesses, so breezy is good, but not so drafty that during colder weather they get chilled. Chickens can tolerate cold weather, but not cold drafty weather.
- One nesting box for every four chickens is the general rule. The nesting box should be away from the entrance of the coop, dark, small and secluded enough in the coop that the hen's instinct to lay her eggs in a safe place is encouraged.
- Food and water are vital so your coop should accommodate a feeder and a waterer that hang 6-to-8-inches off the ground so the hens don't step in it and foul (pun intended) the water.
- At least 10 square feet per bird if they are confined during the day, and 4-square feet if they are free ranging during the day.
- Droppings tray or system for easy capture and disposal of droppings.
- A secured top—either with a roof, half-inch hardware cloth or deer netting to keep out wild birds that carry ticks, parasites and communicable diseases, and that keeps climbing predators (raccoons, etc.) away.

All those "must haves" may seem like a lot, but once your coop is completed and your birds are roosting happily inside, you'll be glad you took the time to ensure all their needs were met.

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# Chicken Coop Positioning Guidelines

Chickens aren't all that different from humans. They don't like to get rained on. They like to shelter in a warm spot when it's cold, foggy and rainy outside. They don't like to stand in puddles. They like clean water and food. They like to be able to wander around at will and they like to be outside and protected from the sun, rain and chill or heat. In other words, they like the shade too.

Chickens also like the same temperatures we like, like 72 °F. Temperature above 95° or 100° will affect chickens like they affect us—they can die of over heating. People don't have claws and combs, but just like we can get frostbit fingers and toes, chickens can get frost bite on their extremities. Keep all that in mind when placing your chicken coop. Here are a few other things you should consider when placing your coop:

- Unless you rig up an automatic door opener that opens your chicken's coop door at dawn, you're the one who has to walk out there and personally let your chickens out for the day. Depending on how far away from the house you are, it can be a morning walk, or a morning hike. Same thing with putting the chickens to bed, at night, when it's dark and cold.
- When you clean the coop every week (at least twice) you need to be close to the place where you're going to haul the used bedding and shavings or buckets of poop, sand and refuse.
- When you go to collect eggs every day, you have to walk out there and back, rain or shine. Will you have to walk through puddles? Is there a slope where rain can run off?
- Too close to the house and your house will smell like chicken poop on hot days. Too far away from the house and you'll have that much farther to carry feed, water and supplies every week.
- If the house is in the open, it's going to be hotter in the summer, colder in the winter. Chickens like the shade for resting, foraging and cooling off.
- How close to electricity are you? If you can't wire in from your house or other power source, you'll have to install solar power to power your heater (lamp) in the winter and to keep the chicken's water bowls from freezing, or the bird's combs (some breeds) from getting frostbit.
- Are you close to a clean water source so you can give your chickens fresh water every day, as well as give them water to bathe in.
- Place your chicken coop so you don't have to walk through manure to get to the coop to collect eggs. This usually happens when the coop is in a fenced in area

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you walk into. You shouldn't have to walk through the manure and the flies (yes, there will be flies) to get to your house or the coop.

- Place the nest box next to the fence line (if in a contained area) so you don't have to go into the fenced in area to get to the nesting box.
- Place your coop under a deciduous tree when possible. It will provide shade (cooling) in the summer and sun in the winter (warmth)
- 
- Make your gate (if you're fencing in an area) wide enough for a wheelbarrow, or you carrying a five-pound bucket in each hand. If you are hauling out manure and bedding from more than a few chickens, you may want to make sure your truck can get to the chicken coop with ease as well.
- Whether you build a porch, or simply throw a tarp over the top of your coop to keep the sun and rain off, remember that chickens like a variety of environments. Yes, they like the shade, but they also like to wander out into the sun, take a dust bath and pursue sunning insects and pests as well.
- As long as your chickens have options (sun, shade, dark coolness of their coop, they'll self regulate and move around as they need to.

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## Choosing the Right Material for Your Coop

One of the best things about building your own coop, (or buying one) is picking the material. Some coops use siding, tin, steel, asphalt shingles and plywood, but they can also use plastic buckets, barrels, plexiglass sheets, aluminum siding or even glass.

There's really no limit on what a coop can be made of. What you should pay attention to is how well the material you select insulates.

Most chickens tolerate the cold, but it stresses them. Depending on the material, the kind of heating system you use, and the insulation, your coop should keep your chickens within the same temperature range you'd be comfortable at (winter and summer) about 68-to-73F.

Although you can use any material you want to create your ideal chicken coop, it's really hard to beat wood as the best material.

### **Advantages of wood:**

- Inexpensive
- Can be painted or stained
- Easily available
- Easy to work with

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- Can be shaped quickly
- Easily painted or stained

**Advantages of plastic:**

- Easy to clean
- Easy to sterilize
- Simply hose it down with water
- Durable and long lasting
- No splinters to worry about
- Lightweight and easy to move

**Advantages of metal:**

- Strong
- Durable
- Long lasting
- Mice, rodents and predators can't penetrate it
- Easy to paint
- Easy to clean (good for manure trays)
- Aluminum is also lightweight

By combining materials, utilizing tin, aluminum or stainless steel for roofing and siding and wood you can create a unique, durable and long-lasting chicken coop that will serve you and your flock for decades.

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## Recommended "Beginner's" Coops

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of owning chickens and want to buy or build large, elaborate coops for your new flock. If you have the skills, time, money, patience and design or plans to do that, then go for it.

But most new owners should pursue something simple until they have a chance to see what kind of coop actually works best for them. Generally an "A" frame structure is a great place to start.

It's easy to build and can easily hold up to eight or even a dozen chickens by altering the dimensions.



Other beginner coops people use or adapt, are small sheds, large doghouses, and even children's playhouses converted to coops by adding nesting boxes and poles for roosting.

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“A” frame coops are easily constructed with 2x4’s, wire mesh, some corrugated steel and hardware (nails or screws, hinges etc).

If you’re only going to have 2-to-3 hens, a large doghouse, with a nesting box (one nesting box per four hens is the general rule) and a pole for roosting, is plenty large.

Remember you’ll need to allow for 4-to-5 square feet per bird in an outdoor run, as well as the 2-3 square feet for roosting.

With smaller flocks your coop can be so compact or small that you can literally remove the lid, or hinge it to open for access to the nesting box.



*Chicken coops can incorporate structures that allow you to confine your flock, or that allow you to move them so your flock can range free.*

*Bottom: A frame of 2x4’s and hardware wire make a structure that allows for both free range and confinement. The enclosure fits snugly into the roof line of the coop, but is easily pulled away (Left) to allow chickens to roam. The ramp folds up at night, securing the hens (and roosters in this case) inside where they’re safe.*





Chicken coops don't have to rest flat on the ground. In fact, by building them off the ground you can create another space for them to go for shade and shelter. Make sure your coop's legs are at least 18-to-24-inches high so your flock can move freely underneath. Remember, the access ramp in the photo above doubles as a night security door for the coop.



### **A well-designed chicken coop**

1. Easily accessible nesting box for removing eggs and cleaning box bedding.
2. Large door that makes accessing the inside of the coop to place food and water easy for the farmer.
3. Sturdy latch that can be locked with a padlock to prevent intrusion by raccoons and other predators.
4. Plenty of space beneath the coop for the chickens to seek shelter, protection and to move in and out of the sun during the day as they need to.
5. Half-inch hardware cloth or wire that not only keeps predators out, but allows air to circulate freely throughout the coop helping to keep hens healthy and odors at a minimum. It also allows the coop to dry out, preventing fungi, mold and bacteria growth.
6. A strong sturdy door not only ensures protection from predators, but also keeps inclement weather (rain, gusts, cold, snow, sleet, hail, and drafts out of the coop as well.

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# FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

## **Q: How many chickens should I get?**

**A:** Only you can answer that. The minimum number you should have is two. Chickens do not do well alone. Better than two is four and up.

## **Q: What kind of chicken should I get?**

**A:** That depends on what you plan to do with them. Particular breeds are known for different things—like laying eggs, or being good eating.

Some breeds, known as dual purpose breeds, lay a lot of eggs and are good eating. Since most chickens live to be about 12-to-15 years old, but only lay eggs for a couple of years, it's important to decide if you want to keep them as pets, as meat producers, or as egg producers.

If you plan to sell eggs, and or meat, or breed your chickens, you'll need to decide which breed is the best choice for you. John White's book, "How to Choose the Ideal Chicken Breed for Your Flock; the Definitive Guide." is one of the many ebooks you receive for free when you join [ChickenCoopGuides.com](http://ChickenCoopGuides.com).

**Membership** also includes 19 coop plans, additional ebooks about raising chickens, a membership forum where you can meet and talk about your flock with other owners. You'll have access to a photo gallery of other coops that people have built using the ChickenCoopGuides plan, and a "video vault" where you can watch funny and educational videos about raising chickens, all for less than \$50US per year.

To learn more, visit: <http://ChickenCoopGuides.com>. The site has all the resources for first time (or experienced) chicken owners who are building their first chicken coops. It's more than 50 pages of content, photos of various breeds and tips to help you pick the best breed for you.

## **Q: What kind of coop do I need?**

**A:** The only real requirements for any basic chicken coop are:

- Easily accessible by your flock
- Easily accessible by you to feed and water, etc.
- Room for every hen to roost and/or nest
- Easy to clean
- Easy to access the nesting box to collect eggs
- Protected from the elements (wind, rain, snow, hail, flood)
- Easy to secure against predators

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- Durable
- Fire safe—especially if you heat with light bulbs or have electricity around
- Legal—ie. meets zoning requirements for a structure

**Q: Is it better to build your own coop or buy a kit?**

**A:** Even if you buy a kit, you're still going to have to put it together. That means taking precut pieces, usually of a cheap grade or quality of wood, and assembling them according to the plans or directions that come with the kit. Buying the plans for a coop you like allows you to select the wood you want, usually of a much higher quality.

If you buy a quality set of plans you can take the cut list to your local home supply store or lumber yard and get them to cut the pieces (sometimes for free, or a small fee) for you. Then you assemble the coop yourself.

The only difference in buying a kit and buying plans is that you get better wood and a more versatile set of instructions when you buy the plans. Plus, plans let you alter, expand or do more with the coop. A kit only shows you how to assemble the parts you have. Plans give you options and detailed architectural blueprints you can alter to fit your needs.

**Q: What is a “Chicken Tractor”?**

**A:** A chicken tractor is a movable chicken coop (of any size) that can be picked up like a wheelbarrow, or is on wheels that allow it to be rolled or moved around your property.

It generally lacks a floor and is designed to allow you to move your chickens from space to space in your yard so they don't out forage or destroy the grass in one area.

Chickens can forage for bugs, weeds and insects from inside the coop. Because there is no floor, the chicken's poop goes straight onto the ground where it acts as a great fertilizer.

**Q: How many nesting boxes do I need?**

**A:** The general rule is one nesting box for every four chickens in your flock. So, one box for four chickens, two for eight chickens and so on.

**Q: How big should a nesting box be?**

**A:** Nesting boxes should be 12x12x12 inches and easily accessible from outside the coop through a hinged lid or way to remove the eggs without going into the coop.

**Q: What is the most important thing I should know before building a chicken coop?**

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**A:** The most important thing you should know before you build your chicken coop is how many chickens you plan to have and whether they will be confined or free range birds. Chickens who are confined to a coop need 5-to-10 square feet per hen, while free range birds need only 3-4 square feet because they are more active during the day.

Other important things to know are that you'll be a better farmer if you associate with other chicken owners online. There are things you may not know to ask about, or things that people only learn over time and after owning many chickens. Not everyone in a city environment owns chicken, so having an online resource to go to when you have questions, concerns or simply just want to "talk chickens," will help you have the healthiest flock you can.

It's important to ask questions as soon as you have a concern because stopping a problem with one chicken can stop it within your entire flock—even if you only have three chickens.

Keep learning. Being a "chicken rancher" is one of the most rewarding hobbies or pursuits you can have.

Wheels allow the coop to be lifted and rolled to other areas around the property.

Lightweight construction techniques and small size makes chicken tractors more portable.



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