

URBAN POULTRY

"Back when Herbert Hoover promised Americans a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage, he could not have guessed that what people really wanted was a chicken in every garage." Courtesy of Michael Jamison of the [Missoulian](#)

Chickens are becoming increasingly prevalent in backyards of urban, suburban, and rural communities, and Cache County is no exception. Hundreds of baby chickens are being purchased right now as local feed stores are selling both broilers and layers and the needed supplies to go with them. This interest has been growing for a few years as small groups have actively promoted the benefits of keeping small family flocks. Reasons for keeping birds include a step towards self-sufficiency through the backyard production of eggs or meat, a compatible partner to a backyard garden through pest control and the production of fertilizer, a cut down on kitchen scraps by feeding to the flock, education for children on where food comes from, and the desire for some to enjoy aspects of "country living" despite one's urban environment.

It's important for poultry proprietors to be aware of city ordinances before planning a backyard flock. If chickens are legal, there may be restrictions and/or requirements that must be abided, such as number of hens (rarely are roosters permitted due to noise), size of coop, and distance of coop to residences. If chickens are not allowed, some proactive residents may work with municipal councils to help modify the law. It is always wise for poultry owners to inform their neighbors about plans to have backyard chickens. Early conversations often help prevent potential future complaints.

Backyard poultry owners must know that chickens will need a dry spot to lay eggs, roost, and generally feel safe when they're not out scratching and hunting for bugs. Chicken coops can be mobile or permanent. A mobile pen is light enough to be moved around the yard or garden and allows for a controlled movement of the chickens and their litter. A permanent pen restricts the chickens to one area. Hens can be released from both pens during the day to roam the yard, and are easily trained to return to roost at night. Poultry owners must always be vigilant of predators and provide the necessary protection for helpless birds.

Backyard poultry production is complicated this year by the presence of Avian Influenza (AI), or "birdflu". The State of Utah has activated a multi-agency response plan because AI was confirmed in a wild bird in Davis County. The discovery of AI in a wild bird is not a surprise since Utah is in a major migratory bird flight path. There is a possibility of the disease being transmitted to domestic bird flocks. Bird owners are advised to take careful bio-security measures to protect their small flocks. Surveillance for avian influenza is ongoing in commercial flocks, live bird markets, and in migratory wild bird populations. Fortunately, there is no immediate public health concern due to the recent detection of the AI virus.

Once introduced, this virus can spread quickly from bird to bird by direct contact. AI viruses can also be spread by manure, dirty equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, and people whose clothing or shoes have come in contact with the virus. AI viruses can remain viable at moderate temperatures for long periods in the environment. The virus can also survive indefinitely in frozen material.

In an effort to assist poultry proprietors in successfully enjoying the benefits of backyard poultry enterprises, USU Extension has organized a class to be held Wednesday, April 22 in the classroom at the USU Caine Dairy Farm (4300 S Hwy 89-91) near Wellsville. There Dr. David Frame, USU Extension Poultry Specialist, will discuss a multitude of topics ranging from facilities, equipment, nutrition, to disease control with approved bio-security measures. The class will begin at 6 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m. We anticipate the training to be a combination of formal presentations as well as response to specific questions. There will be no cost for enrollment, but we would appreciate an RSVP to the Extension office (752-6263) so we can anticipate needed training materials. We look forward to meeting poultry enthusiasts at this meeting.

Utah State University Extension has an excellent series of Fact Sheets for poultry enthusiasts. Individuals who have additional interest in this topic may access those materials at

<http://extension.usu.edu/htm/publications/by=category/category=39>

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