

## 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. Hatcheries are working at maximum capacity, attempting to keep up with orders for both broilers and layers. This interest has grown as small groups have begun to promote keeping small family flocks. Reasons for keeping a flock 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. Many times, permanent pens include a "run", an area outside of the coop where hens can scratch and dust bathe while still being confined within a perimeter fence. Poultry owners must always be vigilant of predators and provide the necessary protection for helpless birds. Poultry housing and equipment, including water lines, feeders, nest boxes, and roosts should be cleaned and sanitized regularly.

No one feed ingredient contains all the nutrients chickens need for a complete diet. Some feed sources are rich in one nutrient, but may lack another. In poultry diets, corn and soybeans are commonly used to provide energy and protein, respectively. Feeds may be commercially available, custom-mixed or mixed by hand at home. Purchased feeds are usually in the form of mash, crumbles, or pellets. Specialty poultry production may involve whole grain feeding, free-choice feeding, and specialty ingredients for finishing, as well as ingredients high in omega-3 fatty acids to enrich meat and eggs. In organic production, 100% organic feeds are used and alternative protein sources are of interest because synthetic amino acids are not generally permitted. Slow-growing birds are usually fed a lower energy and protein diet than fast-growing birds receive. A chicken will stop eating once a certain quantity of energy has been consumed, even if the bird has not ingested sufficient protein or vitamins. As such, the energy in the diet needs to be in balance with other nutrients. Nutrient requirements must be met if chickens are to grow and/or produce eggs. It is

always wise to feed chickens high quality commercial feeds in addition to what they get from scratching. It is not prudent to skimp on feeds, regardless of commercial prices.

It is also important for poultry owners to think about the fate of their birds before the time comes for harvest. Broiler chickens, if properly fed, are ready for the freezer in just a matter of weeks. Laying hens will really begin to drop off in egg production after about 2 years. Many cities do not allow for the backyard slaughter of animals, so plans must be made in advance on how and where to harvest. Many urban poultry keepers do not want to consume their old birds despite no eggs because they have grown to see them as family pets. Whether the hens stay as pets after egg retirement, are consumed, or donated to a local farm, it is important to consider their fate before beginning to raise a small flock.

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/html/agriculture/poultry>.