



# Farm Vet News

Endell Farm Vets Blog

Endell Vets Smallholders Team

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## Chicken Husbandry 101

Over the past decade pet birds have grown hugely in popularity; in 2020 domestic fowl can be found in over 3% of households, with more people owning chickens than horses! However, adopting fowl is often easy and cheap, but it's important to understand what's involved in providing poultry with everything they need to be happy and healthy before taking on these feathered friends.

This article is aimed at keeping chickens, and although there may be slight changes for other species, the principals are the same.



### ENVIRONMENT

To provide fowl with a suitable environment they need space to move around in and exhibit normal behaviours, whilst providing security from predators such as foxes, especially at night. This can be achieved with a large fenced enclosure and a

house/coop that they can go in to overnight, with a sturdy door.

Enclosures of grass and soil work well, and inside the hutch a variety of substrates (including straw and sawdust) can be used for comfort. Fowl like moving around at different levels, and usually feel safer at a height. Anything from perches and ropes to old garden chairs can be used to keep them entertained. Hens love routine, so try to keep feeding times regular and don't alter their enclosure too often as this may stress them out. When hens dig, looking for insects and worms, this can cause the outdoor run to become very muddy in the winter. Combatting this can be done by relocating the house/run around your garden or, where this is not possible, creating an area of bark or gravel which will remain drier. This can also be accompanied by overhead shelter, for somewhere out of the rain or sun.

Inside the coop a nest box facility and perching provision are essential. Although wooden houses may look nicer, if they are made from plastic these are much easier to keep clean and reduce the risk of harbouring red mites.

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### DIET

The average-sized adult hen needs approximately 100g feed per day, which should be fed from a sturdy/heavy feeder, to prevent it from being knocked over. A feeder with cover is even better, as this can protect the feed from the weather and stop wild birds stealing your chicken's grain. Feeding off the floor increases both wastage and the presence of rodents.

Weak eggshells and a variation in egg size from an individual may indicate a calcium deficiency. Oyster shell grit can be fed as a supplement; make sure it is provided in a separate feeder so that the hens which need it take it.

As your flock grows you will need to increase the number of feed and water points to allow the lower ranking birds to adequately feed. Remember, if your flock of birds exceeds 50 (this includes a mixture of species, such as chickens, turkeys, ducks and quail) you will need to register it with DEFRA.

### COMMON SIGNS SHOWN BY UNWELL CHICKENS

As all chickens are individuals it can be hard to tell if they are unwell or just acting differently. The following signs may indicate your chicken is unwell and you should seek veterinary attention:

- A pale comb/wattle (the red fleshy growth that is found on the top of a chicken's head and under their chin)
- Dull and closed eyes
- Separation from the rest of the flock
- Reduced appetite
- Difficulty/reluctance to move
- Loss of condition (the breast muscles are typically the worst affected and chronically ill birds may lose the majority of these muscles)
- Faecal matter around the vent
- Poor feather condition (due to not preening)
- Injury, such as trauma, falling over or limping
- Large variation in egg size and eggshell quality/strength

You should check on your chickens visually every day. Calmly handle them once a week to check feather quality, clean vents, and ensure there are no changes to their breast muscles.

## COMMON PET BREEDS KEPT IN THE UK

### SILKIES

- MEDIUM LAYING ABILITY
- DOCILE
- GOOD WITH CHILDREN
- RELATIVELY RESPECTFUL OF YOUR GARDEN



### SUSSEX BANTAM

- VERY GOOD LAYING ABILITY
- CALM
- CLEAN
- HIGHLY SKILLED AT GETTING TREATS



### BRAHMA

- MODERATE LAYING ABILITY
- DOCILE AND CALM
- "KINGS (QUEENS) OF CHICKENS"



### RHODE ISLAND RED

- GOOD LAYING ABILITY
- LOUD & FRIENDLY
- PUSHY BUT VERY LOVABLE



### NEW HAMPSHIRE

- MODERATE LAYING ABILITY
- FRIENDLY
- HARDY
- ELEGANT
- HEN-NEXT-DOOR CHARM



### MARAN

- MODERATE LAYING ABILITY
- BEAUTIFUL EGGS
- QUIET
- RELAXED (LAZY)



### PLYMOUTH ROCK

- MODERATE LAYING ABILITY
- LARGE
- FRIENDLY
- WHEN WINTER IS HERE, SHE'S READY



### LEGHORN

- VERY GOOD LAYING ABILITY
- ELEGANT
- INDIVIDUALS MAY WAKE UP ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE COOP

