

Raising Your Own Urban Chickens

Urban chickens. If it conjures up an image of chickens in Gucci sunglasses and leather jackets, it's time to adjust your thinking. Urban chickens are simply chickens that are raised in your own backyard. No barnyard necessary. With the green movement, raising your own chickens is becoming increasingly popular, and here are few reasons why:

Better eggs. Fresh eggs have 25% more vitamin E, 33% more vitamin A and 75% more beta-carotene than eggs from factory-farmed chickens. Plus, they just taste better.

Local advantage. Raising your own chickens is a great, sustainable way to support the local food movement and keep your family's food supply fresh and close to home.

Good for your garden. Chickens provide high-nitrogen fertilizer for your garden, and aerate your soil as they forage for bugs and eliminate many common garden pests.

Fun, inexpensive and interesting. Your feathered friends will teach you and your children a lot about responsibility, and where food comes from.

Getting started

Step 1: Check with your local municipality about the specific laws and ordinances in your area. (Most cities and counties allow up to a certain number of chickens per residence.)

Step 2: Decide what type of chickens you want to raise. Books and the Internet are great resources, and Seattle Tilth offers classes on backyard chicken keeping. Visit www.seattletilth.org

Step 3: Prepare a space for your chicks before you buy them. Create a brooding area with pine or fir shavings (not cedar), starter food, a chick waterer, and a heat lamp to maintain proper temperature for the first few weeks.

Step 4: Buy your chicks from a local feed store. DeYoung's in Woodinville sells chicks from March until sometime in May. Give them a call first to check availability.

Step 5: After you bring your chicks home, play with them and pick them up so that they get comfortable being around people.

Step 6: Provide your chickens with water and food everyday. You can feed them chicken feed and vegetables.

At two months: Once your chicks have feathered out, they'll need a little more room to roam. Create a chicken coop and outside run for them. Allow about 2-3 square feet per chicken inside the coop, and 4-5 square feet per chicken outside. Ensure that their new digs are predator-safe.

At 7-8 months: Your chickens should begin to lay eggs. At this time, you'll need to create a nesting box for each chicken—if it's not already built into your coop.

Enjoy your feathered friends – and the fresh, healthy eggs they provide for your family!