

# Chickens

*Gallus gallus*

## FACT SHEET

### Introduction and Origin

Chickens can make good companion animals and can be tamed by hand feeding.

The chicken is a domesticated fowl. Recent evidence suggests that domestication of the chicken was under way in Vietnam over 10,000 years ago. Until this discovery, conventional wisdom held that the chicken was domesticated in India. Some genetic research has suggested that the bird likely descended from both Red and the Grey Junglefowl. Although hybrids of both

**The chicken is the closest living relative of the tyrannosaurus-rex.**

wild types usually tend toward sterility, recent genetic work has revealed that the genotype for yellow skin present in the domestic fowl is not present in what is otherwise its closest kin, the Red Junglefowl. It is deemed most likely, then, that the yellow skin trait in domestic birds originated in the Grey Junglefowl.

The chicken is one of the most common and widespread domestic animals. With a population of more than 24 billion in 2003, there are more chickens in the world than any other bird. Humans keep chickens primarily as a source of food, consuming both their meat and their eggs.

### Getting Your Chicken Home

Birds travel better in cardboard boxes or cages that provide good ventilation, but restrict visual stress. While travelling in the car, try to place the bird in a position out of direct sunlight, and away from noisy car speakers that may cause stress.

### What other Birds will live with Chickens?

Chickens are aggressive with other birds, they are also opportunistic omnivores which means they will kill and eat smaller birds if they get the chance. So chickens are best kept with other chickens

### Diet & Water

Chick starter crumble is a complete diet for the first few weeks, after which you can start to introduce some fresh greens to their diet. Chopped spinach and other similar greens are quite suitable and by 6 weeks they will enjoy boiled vegetable scraps. At this age they can be converted to Laying pellets and Layer Mash. For chickens to lay effectively they need to be well fed. In addition to kitchen scraps and free range foraging they will be given grain (layer mash) each day. Soaking the layer mash in water for the night beforehand makes it easier to digest and they will absorb more nutrition. The birds need access to fresh water all day and dispensers



need to be filled weekly. Hanging the food and water hoppers off the ground keeps them clean and out of the reach of rats and mice.

### Health

Chickens like to dust bath, where they flap, roll and sit in a dusty patch. It gets rid of lice and other bugs naturally. If you don't have a dusty patch in your yard, try a large clay planter dish filled with fine dirt and sand.

As prevention is always easier than cure, your bird should be sprayed with an insecticide every six weeks to kill and prevent mite and lice infestations. Worms can be fatal so treatment and prevention are a must. The use of a broad-spectrum wormer will kill any worms present, and must be repeated every three months.

Chickens also require a safe place to retreat to. If they're feeling stressed, they need a cool, dark place to recover in.

### Sexing

There are two chief methods of sexing chicks: feather sexing and vent sexing. Feather sexing is easy, but it requires that the chickens be specially bred to manifest their sex in differences in the feathers as hatchlings. These are usually hybrids, rather than breeds, and are called sex linked chickens. Most chickens do not have these traits bred into them, and the hatchlings are identical to all but the skilled eye of the professional chicken sexer.

Vent sexing, also known simply as venting, involves the chicken sexer to see if the chick has a small "bump" in the cloaca, which would indicate that the chick is a male

As most people can't afford to hire a professional they have to wait until the hatchlings are four to six weeks old before learning the sexes of their chickens. At that

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time their secondary sex characteristics begin to appear, making it possible for anyone with a minimal amount of training to sex a chicken.

## Housing and Breeding

Chickens are generally low-maintenance. The major challenge is protecting the birds from predators such as dogs and foxes.

Chickens are the perfect animals for the back yard. They convert food scraps to eggs, clean up weeds and fallen fruit and are a great source of manure for your garden. The skill is to set them up to work for you and not against you. Chickens can be very destructive if let loose amongst your favourite plants. It is also important you comply with local council by-laws.

You can use a large rabbit type enclosure or a small bird aviary with an attached run and protection from the sun and rain. The chickens also need a perch to roost on at night and cosy nesting boxes for laying eggs. It is then ready for the chickens to be introduced to their new home.



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## Eggs

Most chickens will start laying around 20 weeks of age. Roosters are not required, as hens still lay eggs, but these eggs are not fertilized by the rooster therefore they will not hatch. You are free to collect them daily and enjoy the product of your love and care for the chickens. Chickens are best kept in small flocks, of at least 3 or 4.

## Varieties

### Isabrown

The Isabrown is a cross between a Rhode Island Red and a White Leghorn and is the most popular breed for backyards.

They have been specifically bred for the domestic, small lot, backyard market that requires a low level of excitability, good egg laying capacity, a lack of flight interest and a natural love of being around people and being picked up and cuddled.

### Silkies

The Silkie (sometimes spelled Silky) is a breed of chicken named for its unique plumage, which is said to feel like silk. The breed has several other unusual qualities, such as dark blue flesh and bones, blue earlobes, and five toes on each foot (most chickens only have four). They are often exhibited in poultry shows, and come in several colors.

### Bantam

Bantams have become increasingly popular as pets as well as for show purposes because they are smaller and have more varied and exotic colors and feather patterns than other chickens. They are great for smaller backyards as they do not need as much space as other breeds. Bantam hens are also used as laying hens, although Bantam eggs are only about one-half to one-third the size of a regular hen egg.

**Further information on diet, hygiene, worming, vitamins, bird stress, licensing, Avian Vets and much more is available from the team at Kellyville Pets.**



At Kellyville Pets, we encourage responsible pet ownership.

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