

Happy chickens  
are allowed to  
roam free range

*Country lifestyle*  
**KEEPING CHICKENS**

*Find out what's involved in raising a happy flock of hens and look forward to freshly laid eggs straight from your garden*

**F**or many of us, a rural idyll includes contented chickens and fresh eggs daily. But keeping hens is not just the preserve of country dwellers. 'There are now 1.2 million domestic fowl kept as pets in the UK. During lockdown, our waiting lists were longer than ever, with almost 30,000 hens reserved,' says Jane Howorth, founder of the British Hen Welfare Trust (BHWT). Before you go ahead, check there are no restrictions on keeping poultry in your area.

#### WHERE SHOULD I SOURCE CHICKENS?

'We'd encourage everyone to adopt ex-commercial chickens. Every year we save 60,000 hens from slaughter and rehome as family pets,' explains Jane. If you do choose to buy your hens, Clare Taylor, The Chicken Whisperer, advises: 'Some people buy hybrids from a supplier. These are easy "starter chickens", bred to be hardy, placid and good layers. Others will be attracted to the pretty plumage and varying sizes of pure breeds; these are usually sourced from specialist breeders.' She advises that 'ex-commercial hens can need more care, so might be better suited to a more experienced keeper'.

#### HOW MUCH SPACE IS NEEDED TO KEEP HENS?

'Start with a minimum of three hens; they're social creatures and like to flock together. They need space to reduce unhealthy behaviour. Provide a minimum of 30sq cm per bird inside the hen house and 25cm perch space each. Outside, ex-caged birds need a minimum of 1sq m per bird, while ex-free range hens need 2sq m per bird,' says Jane. Ensure your space is secure from predators.

#### WHAT FOOD DO THEY NEED?

'They have specific nutritional needs and there are many good feeds on the market. DEFRA has clear regulations on not feeding them kitchen scraps and animal by-products,' says Clare. 'The average hen needs around 100-120g of food a day,' adds Jane.

#### WHAT EQUIPMENT IS REQUIRED?

'You need a robust coop, which comes apart for cleaning, plus a run,' says Clare. You will also need feeders, drinkers, bedding, feed and various nutritional supplements before you start.

#### IS KEEPING CHICKENS TIME CONSUMING?

'Allow about 15 minutes daily to feed, water and attend to health needs, plus an hour each week for cleaning out, mite-proofing and sanitising the coop, plus quarterly mite and worm treatments,' says Clare.

### Useful Resources

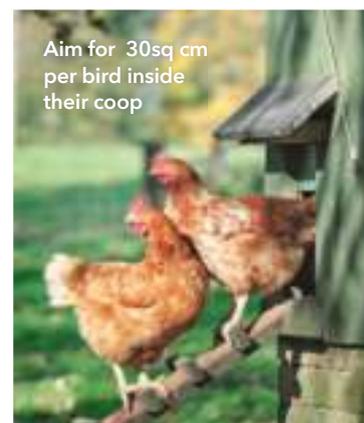
- ◆ Find information and advice for both new and experienced hen keepers on [bhwt.org.uk](http://bhwt.org.uk)
- ◆ The Chicken Whisperer runs beginner and advanced keeping courses, visit [claretaylor.com](http://claretaylor.com)
- ◆ *A Family Guide To Keeping Chickens: How to choose and care for your first chickens* by Anne Perdeaux (£12.99, Little Brown)



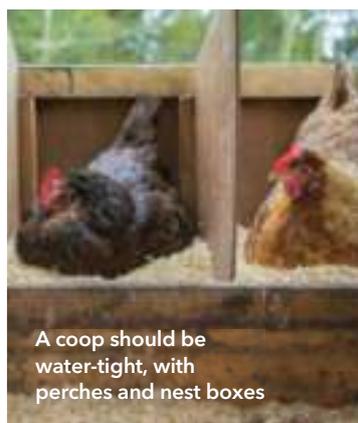
'By adopting a hen, you have the power to save their life. They're such a joy to have around,' says Jane Howorth of BHWT



Enjoy freshly laid eggs each day



Aim for 30sq cm per bird inside their coop



A coop should be water-tight, with perches and nest boxes



Hens are social so start with a flock of at least three



Allow space of at least 2sq m per bird in the run