



STARTING A BACKYARD FLOCK

Learn before you Leap



LEARN ALL YOU EVER NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT KEEPING FARM BIRDS!

Lecture

Sunday, February 23
12:00-3:00 pm
Nevins Farm, Methuen
Sunday, March 9
12:00-3:00 pm
Angell, Boston

Practicum

Offers hands-on learning in the coop
Held at Nevins Farm from 10:00am-1:00pm
Saturday, March 8
Sunday, April 6
Sunday, May 4

Topics

- Establishing a successful flock
 - Nutrition and housing
 - Free roaming flocks
 - Basic handling and safety
- Topics apply to chickens and water fowl.

Fees

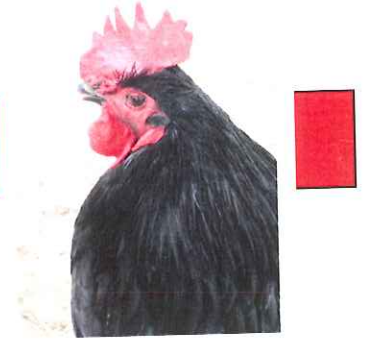
- \$10 fee is required for the lecture
- \$10 fee for the practicum

Contact

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For more information please visit:
www.mspca.org/chickenlecture

Poultry Care



Life Span: 10 - 15 years.

Size: Standard breeds weigh from 4 - 12 lbs. Bantam or miniature breeds weigh 1 or 2 lbs.

Vitals: Normal temperature is 102°F - 106°F. Normal respiration rate is 30-40 breaths per minute. A normal pulse is approximately 100 beats per minute.

Nutrition

Water: Have clean, fresh water available at all times. An automatic poultry waterer placed at a height equal to your birds' shoulder will help keep the water clean and free from debris. It will also keep the litter from getting wet, helping to prevent coccidiosis and build up of ammonia.

Grain: A 'complete' feed is best. It has the proper amounts of essential vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrates and fats. Hens laying eggs should be fed a Layer feed. This provides them with the proper amount of calcium they need for good eggshells. Some stores offer complete organic feed.

Scratch Feed: This is a mix of grains including corn, wheat, oats and rye. Typically it is thrown on the ground for your chickens to peck at. Poultry especially enjoy scratching the earth for their food. Use scratch feed as a supplement to your chicken's diet.

Fruits and Veggies: Chickens love leafy greens and fruits. Be sure to give these in moderation. Rotting food will attract unwanted pests. Pick up what your chickens do not eat at the end of the day.

Grit: If allowed outside, chickens will eat small pebbles which enable them to digest their food. If your chickens spend more time inside, offer them grit.

Oyster Shells: Crushed oyster shells provide additional calcium. If eggshells are thin, offer your this to your hens.

Coop Essentials

Enclosure: Your coop should offer protection from predators-protection from the sides, top and bottom. It should also provide shelter against bad weather. A good coop is draft free in colder months and offers good ventilation in the warmer months. A minimum space of 3 square feet per bird is recommended, although more space is better! Cleanliness is important-be sure your coop is cleaned regularly. A coop that allows you to stand up inside will make cleaning easier.

Bedding: Supply plenty of bedding and regularly check to make sure it's clean and dry. Wood shavings make good bedding material.

Outside Run: Allow a minimum of 9 square feet per bird. Remember more space is better! Use wire mesh or hardware cloth for the sides of your run. Bury the wire 12"-18" in the ground to prevent predators from digging under the fence. You may decide to cover the top with aviary netting or wire mesh. Making your outside run tall enough for you to stand comfortably, will make it more convenient for you to work in and to clean.

Perches: Supply roosting poles for your chickens to perch on. A 2" diameter is recommended. Allow 10" per chicken for roosting space. Placing perches at various levels inside and outside your coop will vertically increase your chicken's communal space.

Nest Boxes: Provide nest boxes for your hens to lay their eggs-one box for every 3 hens. They should be raised off the floor in a secluded area in the coop since hens need privacy when laying their eggs. Clean, dry, wood shavings or straw is commonly used to line the bottom of the nest boxes. A good nest box size is 12"x12".

Feeders: Poultry feeders should be hung at the chickens' shoulder height to prevent debris from contaminating the grain. A good rule to follow is to have enough feeder space to allow all your chickens to eat at the same time.

Waterers: Automatic poultry waterers are convenient. Provide clean, fresh water daily. These too should be kept at the bird's shoulder height and not on the floor. Again, make sure the chickens have enough waterer space to allow them to all drink at the same time.

Some Toxic Plants

Several types of indoor plants, ornamental plants and shrubs are toxic to chickens. Identify plants in your home and around your property to see if they are harmful to your birds. Here are a few examples: Azalea, Buttercup, Ivy, Japanese Yew, Jimson Weed, Milkweed, Mountain Laurel, Nightshade, Philodendrons, Poison Hemlock, Pokeweed, Poinsettia, Rhododendron, Sheep Laurel (Lambkill), St. John's Wort, Skunk Cabbage, Sudan Grass and Water Hemlock.

Handling

Visit your chickens regularly – at least 10 minutes daily. When handling a chicken, place each hand over its wings-gently but firmly – making sure your chicken feels supported underneath. To catch chickens, herd them to a small enclosed space to limit running. **Never leave small children unattended with any animal.**

Health

De-worming: There are many natural and chemical wormers available. Some all-natural products help promote a healthy digestive system. Ask your local feed supply store or avian veterinarian for suggestions for a suitable de-wormer for your birds. When choosing a de-wormer, be sure it is recommended for chickens laying eggs for human consumption.

Vaccines: Most vaccinations are done when the birds are young chicks. Check with your local feed supply store or avian veterinarian to see what, if any, vaccines are recommended in your region.

State Regulations: Check with your state agricultural officials for poultry regulations. For regulations in Massachusetts, visit <http://www.mass.gov/agr/animalhealth/poultry/index.htm>. For health tips and biosecurity information in Massachusetts, visit http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/birdbiosecurity/



LOOK
for Signs



REPORT
Sick Birds



PROTECT
Your Birds

Plan ahead before bringing your chickens home. Here's a checklist to help you prepare:

- Check with your local zoning board to see if chickens (or roosters) are allowed in your area.
- Check with your state officials for mandatory poultry health testing requirements.
- Talk to your neighbors as they may be bothered by your chicken's vocalizations. Also, your chickens may wander onto your neighbors' property.
- Have a safe, appropriate shelter for the size and number of chickens you intend to keep.
- Have ample outdoor space for your chickens.
- Have a plan for manure storage and removal. Make sure it is not stored near wetlands or where it can contaminate surface water.
- Locate a veterinarian for your birds. A Poultry Care book can help with minor health issues.
- Purchase necessary accessories, such as waterers, hanging feeders, etc.
- Plan ahead - Find a responsible person to take care of your chickens when you are away or have an emergency.