

DR. MIKE'S TOP 12 HEN CHORES

A dozen daily jobs to keep backyard hens healthy and safe in urban settings

1. Feed a commercially produced ration specifically designed for laying hens, generally not available at pet stores. It is difficult to make a balanced diet at home, and should only be done if you are very experienced and knowledgeable.
2. Do not feed more than a minimum of treats. Mealworms, scratch grains, table scraps and other treats are nutritionally deficient, and if they make up more than 5-10% of the hen's ration, they can lead to nutritional diseases.
3. Failing to provide sufficient amounts of clean water each day can lead to infection and illness. This can be challenging in the winter.
4. Hens need shade on hot days and a source of warmth on cold days.
5. Learn how to recognize discomfort or disease in your flock. Chickens are naturally stoic and the signs of pain and illness are subtle. The majority of hens that are described by their owners as dying suddenly have had chronic issues that had gone unnoticed. Observe all of your chickens daily and look carefully for changes in activity or behaviour.
6. Keeping your coop and run clean is important for both chicken and human health. Have a plan to deal with the nearly 1kg of manure that each hen produces each week. Composting a significant amount of manure is very difficult because of the high nitrogen levels and acidity.
7. All livestock, including chickens, can be carriers of diseases which can be transmitted to humans who are in close contact with them, especially children. It is important to learn how to handle and care for hens without accidentally exposing yourself to animal diseases which can have serious consequences. It is also important to wash your hands every time after handling your chickens, their eggs, or working in the coop.
8. Hens can live to be 7-10 years old. Older hens need to take a break from egg production periodically. Going out of production is termed molting, occurs naturally, and is necessary for older hens to remain healthy. Have a plan for how you will deal with birds that are transitionally out of production, or are done the egg laying portion of their lives. This includes having a safe plan for disposal of any chickens that die under your care.
9. Be aware that many treatments and medications that are given to hens will end up in your eggs. Understanding and respecting withdrawal times for medications given by yourself or your vet are necessary to ensure that contaminated eggs are not eaten.
10. New birds coming into your flock should be vaccinated if at all possible. Most viral diseases such as Marek's Disease and Infectious Laryotracheitis (ILT) are not treatable and are devastating to flocks, but can be prevented through vaccination.
11. Be sure to lock up the chickens at night to keep them safe from skunks, rats, raccoons and neighbourhood pets who will eat the hens and their feed.
12. Eggs are porous and can absorb invisible harmful bacteria if not handled properly.

Avian influenza has become a serious threat to poultry around the world in the past several years. The disease is devastating to both hobby and commercial flocks. If you have sudden, unexplained mortality in several birds, call the Canadian Food Inspection Agency hotline at 226-217-8022 to get testing for this catastrophic disease so it cannot spread to other flocks.

Small Flocks Have Risks - A Vet's Perspective

Prospective small flock hen keepers need to worry about protecting hen and human health.

More municipalities are allowing for the keeping of backyard hens, and interest in keeping chickens for enjoyment and egg production is growing.

- Proper care of hens is more complicated than keeping other pets because poultry have different biological needs, get several diseases that can be transmitted to people, and because unlike pets, hens produce something that we eat. Chickens are indiscriminate in where they deposit their droppings. Any area chickens have access to should be considered to have fecal contamination.
- Even healthy hens will lay eggs with bacteria on the outside of the shell. Proper handling of the eggs is crucial in preventing these bacteria from penetrating into the egg or contaminating anything they contact. Contact your doctor if any disease or infection occurs, and inform medical professionals that you are in regular contact with chickens.
- Animal welfare in small flocks is only good if the caregiver is knowledgeable and conscientious. Providing adequate space, protection, nutrition and environmental conditions are imperative for the well-being of your hens. If you aren't sure of minimum requirements for hens, consult the Canadian Code of Practice produced by National Farm Animal Care Council at: nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/pullets-and-laying-hens. Also check out Ontario's small flock website at: smallflockontario.ca.
- Protecting your birds from predators is a major consideration for the well-being of your flock. Developing a safe environment that can protect from common predators including raccoons, rats, snakes, skunks, owls, hawks, dogs, cats, weasels and other predators takes forethought, investment and vigilance.
- Veterinary care for your flock is fundamental for both your health and the health of your birds. Establish a relationship with a vet who is knowledgeable about poultry before you have a problem. Vets are a great resource for care, nutrition and prevention as well as disease control.
- Chickens are indiscriminate peckers. The most effective way to prevent your flock from getting a disease is to keep it out of the chicken yard.
- Biosecurity is a concept that must be understood and implemented by all backyard chicken keepers. Quarantining incoming birds and separating your hens from other birds, other flocks and other people associated with chickens are major components of maintaining a healthy flock.

DID You Know?

manure

A hen excretes approximately 2 lbs of manure per week!

health

A hen may appear healthy, but can be laying eggs to the detriment of their own health if not properly cared for.

feed

Laying hens need feed that is especially high in protein and calcium. The high calcium level that a hen needs in her diet would be toxic to non-producing animals such as a cat or dog.



May 2023 – Backyard Chickens

1. Toronto

The City of Toronto has a [program](#) that permits residents to have backyard chickens in specific pilot areas across the City. However, only hens are allowed in Toronto, the keeping of roosters is prohibited. In addition, hens are to be kept as pets for egg production only, not as livestock to eat.

A maximum of 4 backyard hens are allowed per eligible residential property within the City. All hen coops must not be located in the front yard. Furthermore, it is illegal to have backyard hens outside of the pilot areas or have backyard hens that are not registered with the City of Toronto.

In April 2023, CBC Canada [reported](#) that Toronto could pause its backyard chicken pilot program in light of avian influenza cases.

2. Ottawa

The City of Ottawa allows the keeping of backyard chickens in areas zoned for agricultural purposes. Chicken must not be allowed to run at large in the areas where they are allowed to be kept within the City. The keeping of Pigeons or Doves is also allowed in the [City of Ottawa](#).

3. Brampton

The City of [Brampton](#) in Ontario's Greater Toronto Area allows a maximum of two backyard hens per property. However, residents must obtain a license to keep the two hens. In addition to 2 hens, Brampton residents may also keep two pigeons on a lot.

4. Kitchener

In the City of [Kitchener](#), residents are allowed to keep up to four chickens in their backyards. However, Kitchener residents must obtain a permit for a fee of \$52 before keeping any chickens. And the issuance of the permit is subject

to property inspection and neighbors' consent. Chicken coops must be kept 2.5m away from side lot lines and 1.2m away from rear lot lines.

5. Burlington

It is legal to keep chickens in your backyard if you reside in the rural part of Burlington, Ontario. According to the City's [website](#), your property must be zoned as rural or agricultural to keep chickens in addition to other domestic fowl, including pheasants, grouse, guinea fowls, turkeys, and peafowls. Similar regulations are in place in the cities of Greater Sudbury, Chatham-Kent, Sarnia, and Cambridge.

6. Guelph

The City of Guelph allows the keeping of up to 10 backyard chickens, excluding roosters. Guelph residents are required to register their chickens with the [City](#).

7. Kingston

If you live in the City of Kingston, Ontario, you may have up to 6 backyard hens, provided you are in compliance with the Backyard Hens [Rules](#).

8. Waterloo

The keeping of up to 4 backyard hens is allowed on residential properties in the City of Waterloo. The City requires that residents obtain an [annual permit](#) for a fee of \$26.27 before keeping any chickens. Waterloo prohibits the keeping of roosters, only hens are allowed. Hen coops or runs must be fully enclosed and kept at least 1.5 meters away from property lines.

9. Brantford

The City of Brantford's [bylaw](#) requires that residents obtain a \$100 permit to keep backyard chickens within the City. A maximum of 10 chickens, including 1 rooster

is allowed per property in Brantford, Ontario. Chickens must be kept in a clean and sanitary condition and at least 7.5m away from structures on other lots.

10. Niagara Falls

In Niagara Falls, a maximum of 10 backyard chickens are permitted within the Urban boundary. Roosters are not permitted in [Niagara Falls](#). All hen coops must be located at least 25 feet from the rear lot line and 15 feet from any side lot line.

Other Cities That Allow Backyard Chickens in Ontario, Canada

- [Peterborough](#): Allows 4 hens. Permit required
- [Kawartha Lakes](#): Allows chickens on properties not zoned as residential
- [Norfolk County](#): Allows a maximum of 4 backyard hens
- Township of [Alnwick/Haldimand](#): Allows a maximum of 6 hens
- [Quinte West](#): Allows four hens per residential property
- [Orangeville](#): Allows a maximum of 3 hens per property