

Fresh water should always be available, supplied by a gravity-fed drinker and scrubbed regularly, in order to avoid algae build-up and contaminated stale water. Cider vinegar (10ml:500ml, plastic drinker only) in the water once a month helps reduce pathogens.

## CHOOSING YOUR POULTRY

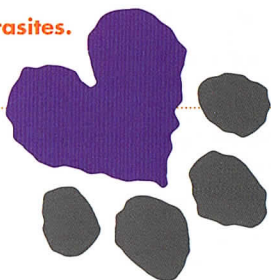
You will need to think carefully about what type of fowl you want to keep, and how much space you have available. Before you decide to buy your chickens or ducks, you must first consider whether you can meet their welfare needs of correct environment, diet, behaviour, company and health.

### A healthy fowl should have:

- A bright and alert appearance with a red comb
- Smooth and shiny plumage
- Have a clean vent area
- Straight toes and smooth shanks
- Produce quite firm dark droppings with a white tip
- Free from obvious external parasites.

## SHOPPING LIST

- Hen/Duck House
- Fenced enclosure or ark
- Gravity-fed water-drinker
- Food containers
- Perches (for hens)
- Poultry layer pellets
- Nest boxes (for hens)
- Pond or substitute (for ducks)
- Straw
- Wood shavings
- Mixed grit (includes oyster shell)
- Licensed wormer
- Poultry-safe disinfectant
- Book on poultry care



The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

### The Five Animal Welfare needs:

1. **Environment:** Pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
2. **Diet:** Pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
3. **Behaviour:** All pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
4. **Company:** Some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
5. **Health:** All animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.



### Remember – you should never release your pet into the wild.

This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

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To show your support for The Pet Charity please text TPTC30 and the amount in pounds you wish to donate to 70070.

This leaflet has been produced with the help of Victoria Roberts BVSc MRCVS, Premier Backyard Poultry Vet. If you require further help or advice please visit [www.vicvet.com](http://www.vicvet.com)



The British Veterinary Zoological Society supports the aims of The Pet Charity to secure and enhance the welfare of pet animals. For more information visit [www.bvzs.org](http://www.bvzs.org)



This leaflet is supported by the

PET INDUSTRY FEDERATION

# GUIDE TO CARING FOR CHICKENS & DUCKS

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*For joy, health & companionship*



The keeping of a small group of domestic hens or ducks is becoming increasingly popular.



# THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR DOMESTIC CHICKENS AND DUCKS

The availability of compact housing means that even the smallest of suburban gardens can be home to a couple of chickens. The owner can be rewarded with fresh eggs at breakfast time plus much enjoyment and entertainment.

Properly cared for domestic fowl will live for several years, although maximum egg production is only likely for two or so years. Being gregarious birds, domestic fowl should be kept in small groups. It is not necessary to have a cockerel or drake unless you intend to breed.

Cockerels can be noisy and potentially cause upset to neighbours and drakes will over-mate the ducks.

## GENERAL CARE

Good animal husbandry and welfare is an essential part of keeping domestic fowl. This means providing suitable food and housing, which must be cleaned out regularly, and observing their behaviour to look out for signs of illness.

**Respiratory infections:** Your poultry house should have permanently open, but vermin-proof, ventilation at the top of the hut on two sides. This is vital to remove ammonia, which can cause respiratory problems. The birds may be sneezing and/or have snotty nostrils with foam in the eye if suffering from excess ammonia or a respiratory infection. Keep in a warm outhouse and consult with your vet.

**Diarrhoea:** This can be caused by an excess of green, mouldy or contaminated food, a change in diet or dirty water. Normal droppings from the caeca are a different consistency and colour, occurring about twice daily.

**Mites and lice:** These are parasites that feed on birds' blood, causing itching and anaemia. Mites live in the hut during daylight hours and can be destroyed with a suitable spray. Lice live on the hen all the time and louse powder is effective against these. Diatomaceous earth used all the time in the litter will help prevent parasite build-up.

**Toenails:** Overgrown claws may need to be filed to the correct shape if they display excessive growth. Care must be taken if cutting claws to avoid damaging the blood vessels and nerves. Consult your vet or pet shop.

**Parasitic worms:** Part of their lifecycle is in insects, which are favourite chicken snacks, so poultry should be treated regularly to prevent excessive build-up. It's important to worm hens and ducks with a licensed wormer two to three times a year.

**Illness:** Chickens are prey animals so hide their symptoms if they're sick. A sick chicken will stand with its feathers ruffled and its eyes closed to conserve energy – seek veterinary attention immediately.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The pecking order is very important to maintain the stability of a flock, and only changes if hens are added or removed.

## BEHAVIOUR

The pecking order is very important to maintain the stability of a flock, and only changes if hens are added or removed. Chickens love to scratch with their feet to find insects; even tiny chicks will do this. The flock keeps watch for potential aerial predators and has a special call to alert their friends. You should keep at least two chickens or ducks, as they are happier with company.

You should handle your poultry weekly to check weight and condition. Pick one hen off the perch with both hands around her wings and body, facing you. Slide one hand under her so her breast rests on your outstretched palm, her legs between your first/second and third/fourth fingers which are then clenched firmly together. Your other hand is lightly placed over her back to balance her as you lift her off the perch. Take the weight on your forearm and hold her close to your body, her head pointing towards your armpit, leaving your other hand free to inspect the bird. Do not squeeze the body as it harms the breathing.



## HOUSING

Domestic hens and ducks can be kept in separate, simple, predator-proof wooden huts with a perch if keeping hens. The enclosure must be sufficient to allow for natural foraging behaviour and be of a suitable size so the ground does not become a quagmire, which is particularly important with ducks, who like to sieve food and mud together.

Perches and nest boxes should be sufficient for the number of hens. The floor area should be a minimum of 30 x 30cm per bird, plus 1 x 1m per bird for day-time area. Hens can be accommodated in a movable wood and mesh ark, thereby ensuring that any grassed area does not become over-used and rife with the build-up of parasites and droppings. Alternatively, more roomy permanent fenced accommodation can be

provided. Fencing can be electrified in order to deter foxes but, in any case, domestic fowl should be shut in each night. Clematis, honeysuckle, berberis, pyracantha or firs can be grown on the outside of the run both for shelter and to enhance the area.

Ducks will require either a small pond, which is easy to clean, with an easy entry and exit, or a water-containing vessel large enough to submerge their heads. This is essential to allow the ducks' behavioural and physiological need to bathe, without which feather condition and health will rapidly deteriorate.

Hen houses will need perching of 5cm width with rounded edges for the birds to roost on at night, but will not be used by domestic ducks, except for Muscovy ducks. The general floor space in the house should be covered in a reasonably deep layer of clean wood shavings and/or straw or commercial poultry dust-free bedding.

Hens will require nesting boxes – one per three to four hens – inside the hen house to lay their eggs. These should be inspected daily for removal of eggs and lined with clean straw (do not use hay due to harmful moulds). Domestic ducks will not ordinarily use such nest boxes, instead, the eggs will need to be removed from the general floor area of their house.

How often the house needs cleaning out will depend on the number of birds, the type of house and the type of bedding material used. It is important to ensure that droppings and soiled bedding are removed and replaced regularly to prevent disease. Every month a thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the house should be undertaken.

## FOOD AND WATER

Domestic fowl need to have a regular supply of commercial, balanced feed. With sufficient space and/or changing of the position of the enclosure, domestic fowl will forage naturally for part of their dietary intake. Diet can be supplemented with additional fresh vegetable material, particularly in the winter. Please note that it is illegal to feed poultry scraps from your own kitchen, to prevent disease transference.

Grain, such as whole wheat, should also be offered: maize is useful in cold weather but can lead to feather pecking in warm weather. It is a good idea to provide whole barley or wheat for ducks in a bowl of water to avoid wild bird contamination.

Mixed grit is needed so the birds can successfully grind their food, with oyster shell grit in order to help ensure sufficient calcium levels for good egg production.

Commercially produced specialised feeders and drinkers are readily available and help keep food and water clean by not allowing poultry to defecate in it. Wild birds should be kept away from these.