

# Urban Chicken Guidelines



## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to chicken keeping in the City of North Vancouver!

As part of the City's overall efforts to promote food security and urban agriculture activities in our community, the City of North Vancouver has amended our bylaws to permit City residents to keep chickens. As an owner of urban chickens, you are taking on a hobby that is both fun and fulfilling, but also comes with responsibilities to the hens and the neighbours in your community.

These Guidelines have been provided to assist you deciding whether or not you would like to keep chickens. If you have already decided to keep chickens, the Guidelines also help you in knowing what you will need to do to be responsible chicken keepers.

## **APPLICABLE BYLAWS & REGULATIONS**

The following is a brief overview of the City's hen keeping bylaws and regulations. Please see each bylaw for further details and information. The bylaws can be found on the City website ([www.cnv.org](http://www.cnv.org) and search for 'Bylaws')

- Zoning Bylaw: Only City residents who live one-unit residential areas are permitted to keep chickens.
- Small Creatures Limitation Bylaw: This bylaw has been amended to permit City residents to keep up to 8 hens of at least 4 months of age. Keeping roosters, selling eggs and butchering of chickens are all not permitted.
- Nuisance Bylaw (noise and smell): This bylaw may be enforced if the City is notified that the chickens are too loud or produce excessive odour

If you have any questions, please call the City of North Vancouver at 604-985-7761.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Lifespan**

- Chickens can live up to 14 years or longer
- Ultimately depending on the breed, egg laying for a hen generally starts at 6 months old, peaks at 18 months and declines with age.

### **Costs**

Equipment you will need to budget for includes:

- a coop
- tools
- lighting
- feeder & waterer
- food storage
- maintenance supplies
- cleaning supplies
- heating / cooling appliances
- nets/fencing
- security locks

Ongoing costs include:

- Food, bedding (straw or woodchips), nutritional supplements, cleaning supplies
- Vet care if your hen becomes ill.
- Consider exam fee, possible diagnostics, medications costs and other costs related to illness or injury.

### **Time**

Hens should be cared for twice daily. Chickens typically wake up with the sun and retire to the coop at dusk. In the morning, open up the coop to let them out into the run, ensure sufficient food & water are provided and clean for the day. In the evening to ensure adequate supplies for the evening and that all birds are securely confined overnight.

You will need to set aside time for:

- Cleaning
- Grooming
- Observing your chickens
- Coop & enclosure construction
- Giving medication
- Parasite control
- Physical exam
- Travel time for purchase of supplies
- Coop & enclosure maintenance & repair
- Feeding

During vacations and weekends away, you will have to schedule someone reliable to fully attend to your birds.

## Coop and Pen Location

The coop and pen should be located in an area that provides:

- Morning sun and afternoon shade, especially important in the Summer;
- Good drainage: Standing water will promote health concerns;
- A dry, covered area for dust paths and protection;
- Protection from prevailing winds; and,
- Consideration for your neighbours when locating your coop.

## Pests and Predators

Chickens in the City of North Vancouver will attract:

- black bears & cougars
- coyotes
- bird mites & lice
- mice
- raccoons
- squirrels
- dogs & cats
- birds: yard & predatory/raptor species
- rats
- curious humans (big & small)

It is your responsibility as the chicken owner to ensure that your flock is protected to the greatest extent possible from predators and pests by providing a secure pen and coop, monitoring their health and hygiene and keeping feed in a dry and secure location.

## Companionship

Chickens need other chickens to be happy and healthy. Plan to have at least 2--- they are flock animals and need the companionship of other chickens. While City permits residents to keep up to 8 chickens, generally, 3 to 4 compatible chickens can be well maintained in a typical city environment and will provide enough eggs for typical family of four.

An individual bird's age and temperament can affect compatibility. Overcrowding of chickens is the most common mistake. Sometimes single birds can thrive with a special needs human friend.

Please note that roosters are not permitted due to the noise they typically create. You do not need a rooster for your hens to lay eggs. Hens will lay eggs regardless of whether or not a rooster is present; the eggs will simply be sterile.

## Handling and Restraint

To catch a bird:

- Herd the bird to a corner using slow, deliberate movements.
- Place hands over top part of wings (shoulders) and hold securely but do not squeeze.

- Pick up and hold under arm to keep wings in place. Support feet with other hand if bird will tolerate.
- To restrain for transport or examination, drape a towel over shoulders cape style and wrap around body.

## Transportation

There are few things to consider when bringing your chicken home or transporting them.

- Consider travel time and avoid extreme weather conditions when bringing home new hens.
- Heat exhaustion can develop quickly; interior car temps can reach a fatal point in 10 minutes.
- Medium-sized, hard pet carriers work well for security, safety and stress.
- Line with a towel, shredded paper or straw.
- Food is a good stress reducer. Offer wet food like greens or cucumber for long trips.

## Bringing Hen Home

- If other birds are already present, a 2 week quarantine in a separate area is recommended to watch for signs of illness and parasites.
- Avoid noisy, high traffic areas and allow the bird to acclimate before introducing to other birds, animals and family.
- The majority of their waking hours are spent active, grazing, foraging for food - plants, bugs and occasionally small rodents. The hens spend their days scratching for food, dust bathing, preening, playing and napping.
- Hens begin to lay eggs at about 6 months of age. Domesticated hens have been bred to lay one egg a day but by 18 month of age, egg laying frequency generally diminishes and many adult or senior hens stop laying altogether.
- Chickens are sociable, cheerful and intelligent creatures that can form lifelong bonds with each other and other species. Because of their keen intelligence and instinctive physical activity, they need a stimulating environment that mimics as much as possible the rich and diverse world nature designed them to enjoy.

## COOP

### General

The primary features any coop should address are a closed structure which provides shelter from cold, heat, wind, rain, snow and predators for a protected roosting, nesting, feeding and watering space.

Once these basic features are addressed, you can consider any coop as an opportunity to be creative and be a little fun. Consider the fact that this coop will be a rather permanent feature in your garden and as such, should be pleasant to look at, functional for you to service and meet the needs of your chickens. It should be located in a convenient location in addition to taking into account the micro

climate of your garden. Is it easy to get to from your home? Is it close to an outside water tap and where feed is stored?

These are just some of the questions you should consider when siting a coop in your yard. Numerous examples of coops exist in books on the subject as well as on-line at urban chicken websites.

NOTE: Cardboard boxes, rabbit hutches, plastic igloos, dog houses, etc. are not appropriate structures.

## **CONSTRUCTION & MATERIALS**

Coops can be purchased ready-made or in kits, constructed within an existing structure or built from scratch, utilizing either new or recycled/scavenged material. Sample plans and examples of coops are generally available on Urban Chicken web sites as well as books on the topic. The coop should be structurally sound and stable. Consider that wood in contact with dirt will rot with time.

### **Walls**

- Materials that are resistant to moisture and mould and easily cleaned are best.
- Chemically treated materials should be nontoxic.
- A good compound with anti fungal agents is good for humid areas.
- Clear varnish is also good.
- Everything should be treated or painted before it is assembled.
- Wooden structures should be draft free.

### **Roof**

When considering the size and extent of the roof on your coop, consider the North Shore's climate (heavy rains in fall and winter and extensive sun in the summer). Consider extensive overhangs to keep chickens dry and clean.

- The coop roof should be made of a material that will not collect and hold heat.
- The roof surface should be covered with an insulating tar paper to protect from heavy rains.
- The roof should be slightly inclined, to allow water to run off. Consider a gutter to collect and direct run off to a desired location.
- A few small openings along the eaves allow moisture to escape and provide fresh air.

## Floor

The floor should not collect and hold moisture, be easy to clean, retain heat in cold weather and exclude rodents/predators.

- A dirt floor draws heat away and is not easy to clean nor is it rodent/predator-proof.
- A wood floor is adequate provided it is at least a foot off the ground, insulated and sealed properly but is difficult to sanitize because it is porous.
- A concrete floor is ideal since it discourages rodents/predators and is easy to sanitize.

Regardless of the floor type, bedding strewn on the surface is needed to absorb moist fecal matter and facilitate cleaning. Leaves or wood shavings work best and can be composted or easily bagged and disposed of as solid waste.

## Doors

Doors for chickens should be just large enough for the largest bird and can be positioned anywhere from ground level to about 2 feet high with a stable ramp with cleats. Chickens are ground dwellers, not parrots. As such, small doors at heights greater than 3 feet with flimsy, unstable ladders are not appropriate. Doors must be able to be secured against predators at night.

Do not forget to provide easy human access to the coop so you can collect eggs and clean the entire coop. Consider how you will be cleaning your coop and whether you will have to bend over for longer times or kneel to clean the coop. Remember, you will have to clean it daily so make it comfortable for yourself!

## Windows

You may consider windows as chickens love windows and need natural light. Cover with 1/2" metal screen so they can be opened for ventilation in hot weather.

## Roosts

Chickens don't sleep on the ground, but jump up to pieces of wood above the ground where they typically huddle together for warmth and security.

- Lumber or branches can be used. They should be strong enough and mounted securely enough to hold all birds.
- The surface should be rough for good grip with no splinters or sharp edges.
- For medium sized birds, 2" or 4" flat or 1 1/2" diameter is best for foot comfort.
- The longer the roost the better to prevent competition through crowding.
- They should be set 18" from wall, 2-3 feet off the floor. If mounted higher, rung steps are needed, and should be spaced 8 to 12 inches apart.

The addition of a dropping board underneath and elevated roost will collect droppings and keep floor space below clean and inhabitable.

## Regional and Micro-Climate Concerns

The Climate on the North Shore sees a considerable amount of rainfall, especially during the fall and winter months. Snowfalls occur more often than elsewhere in Metro Vancouver. Your coop design should take this fact into account. Consider the sun's angle in the sky throughout the year and provide shade in the summer and capture as much of the sunlight in the winter months.

When it gets hot...

- On hot summer days you will need to think about keeping you coop and birds cool. You can do this by building your coop in a shaded area and keeping the surrounding area cool on hot days. You can do this by spraying down the coop, not the birds. You may consider providing a fan on very hot days if there is little or no air movement.

When it gets colder...

- Chickens can tolerate quite a bit of cold weather. You will need to ensure that their drinking water does not freeze and that their coop is not drafty or damp.
- If you provide heat for your hens you may consider only providing a heat lamp. If hens are kept dry and the coop does not have drafts your birds will not need much heat.
- Use caution when considering what to put in your coop as heaters and lamps can cause fire hazards. Your coop can have a lot of dust and combustible materials, from feathers, to feed, to straw.

Your best protection is to build a coop and outdoor enclosure to keep your birds dry and free from drafts.

## Ventilation

Doors, windows and vents near the ceiling supply oxygen, dissipate heat from breath, remove moisture from breath and droppings, harmful gasses and dust particles, and dilute disease causing airborne organisms.

## Light

Natural light from windows and/or skylights should be provided. The minimum light intensity you should provide should be enough to clearly see the hens feed when standing over the feeder.

## Feeders & Feed

Food receptacles should be made of a non-corrosive material that is easily cleaned and minimizes spillage, prevents contamination with droppings and keeps food dry. The containers should be large

enough for all the birds to comfortably eat at once or numerous enough to prevent competition or intimidation.

Feed is available at most pet supply shops and agricultural supplies stores, such as Otter Co-op. Feed typically is sold in 20kg bags and come as small pellets. Ensure that the feed has an adequate balance of micro nutrients as well as calcium for eggshell strength. You may also provide an additional source of calcium with crushed oyster shells, sold separately, and should be mixed in with the feed. Ensure the feed is stored in a dry, secure and rodent proof container.

Chickens require grit to break down their food. After taking a portion of food into their beaks, it travels down the throat to a cavity called the gizzard where small stones and sand assist the chicken with the physical breakdown of the food before proceeding to the stomach for final digestion. You will need to provide grit, a crushed stone, and some sand to provide the material in the gizzard.

Chickens also enjoy eating chicken scratch which is a combination of various grains and seeds. Finally, chickens love food and kitchen scraps of all kinds. In addition to your composter, chickens are another source for dealing with compostable food material as well as grains, meat, bread, pasta, etc. Their palette is really quite wide. Search the internet for a list of the few foods that are toxic or not recommended for chickens to consume.

## **Waterers**

Water receptacles should be made of non-corrosive material that can be cleaned and disinfected with a solution of chlorine bleach, prevent contamination with droppings and is spill and leak proof. The containers should be large enough for all the birds to comfortably drink at once and hold enough water for all birds for an entire day. They should be slightly positioned higher than the feeder or far enough away to prevent contamination with food.

## **Nest Boxes**

One nest box for every 2 -3 hens. Chickens prefer wooden nest boxes with covered opening for privacy placed on or as low to the floor as possible. If set higher they require a perch in front of the opening. They should be filled with 2 -4 inches of straw, litter or grass.

## ***CHICKEN RUN DESIGN***

### **General**

The run (aka a pen) is the fenced area surrounding the coop that provides secure access to exercise, sunlight, earth and vegetation and is freely available to the birds when they are unsupervised during the day. It is constructed to prevent the bird's escape and prevents entry by intruders/ predators.

- If the coop is elevated 2 feet so the chickens can use the space underneath, the coop and pen should not occupy the exact same footprint.

- Do not forget to provide adequate opening and space for a person to be able to clean the entire outdoor pen area and to be able to catch hens if needed.

## Pen Floor

Choose a well drained area. Material for the floor should be clean, non-toxic, biodegradable, readily available, inexpensive and replaceable. Since it will become compacted from little feet and contaminated by concentrated droppings and parasites, it will need to be raked out and replaced frequently to reduce odour and fly activity. Play sand, leaves, municipal wood chips, sod and hard wearing ground cover work well.

## Fencing

The type of fencing depends on what are the most likely predators in your area. They typical one-unit residence will have a hedge and/or fence along all sides of the property line. This should be kept in good condition as it will serve to keep most predators out. Should it not, consider that dogs, rats, raccoons, and coyotes are the most prevalent in City neighbourhoods, and your coop and run need to be secured against these animals. It's best to build the strongest deterrents possible.

Chain link panels or welded or woven fencing on a sturdy frame reinforced at the bottom with small mesh metal wire that prevents predators from tunnelling under the fence will discourage most intruders. Regular inspection is key to security.

## Cover

The outdoor pen should be covered to keep hens in and predators out. Covering the pen with a roof such as corrugated fiberglass can provide shade and rain shelter.

## Windbreak

Providing a wind and rain/snow break will provide the birds a protected area to allow them to be outdoors even in winter. For example, consider locating the coop along the side of a fence, hedge or built structure, such as a garage.

## Shade

Shade must be available and can be provided by vegetation or strategically placed materials.

## Dust bath

Taking a dust bath is essential for the health of the chicken. They bathe in loose dry soil depressions in the dirt which cleans their feathers and rids them of parasites. Birds will usually dig their own hole for dust baths.

- If they are unable to dig their own dirt bath area you will need to provide one.
- Keep the soil in the dust bath loose and add play sand if it is a heavy clay soil.

- Adding a little poultry dust, diatomaceous earth or wood ash increases the effectiveness of parasite control.
- Large heavy rubber feed buckets filled with play sand are a welcome addition to the indoor coop in the winter.

### **Enrichment furnishings**

Lots of large branches, stumps or platforms provide places to go and things to do and look natural and attractive in the pen. You can include bushes, boxes or other objects to sit in or hide behind. You can plant kale or other safe, edible vegetation around the outside of the pen for forage. Overcrowding, boredom and barren pens are the most common cause of behaviour problems.

### **Nontoxic Plants**

Chickens are inquisitive and voracious eaters of vegetation and many ornamental garden plants can be toxic to them. Learn which of your plants might be harmful and be sure your hens cannot reach them through the fencing.

## ***CHICKEN CARE & WELL BEING***

### **General**

Fresh food and water are required daily and should be available at all times of day and night. Hay, grain and prepared feed should be fresh, less than one year old and free of mould, insects or other contaminants. Feed should be stored in rodent proof containers in a cool dry area inaccessible to animals. Food that is uneaten or spilled should be removed from animal enclosures daily.

- Caution toxic: onion, avocados, chocolate, among other items
- Supplements: oyster shells or limestone for calcium, granite grit for digestion, mineral salt or ground salt licks for micro nutrients.
- Chickens drink 1 - 2 cups of water a day.

### **Social Needs**

Temperament and social structures of animals should be taken into account, and separate areas provided for incompatible birds. With multiple birds, chickens will establish a *pecking order* where one bird is dominant and the rest fall behind in a declining hierarchical scale. Between the 'top chicken' and the 'bottom chicken', the access to food and water is determined by the pecking order established in the flock.

### **Vet Care**

Locate a veterinary clinic nearby that will see chickens before one is needed, preferably one that specializes in avian care. Chickens are welcome in increasing numbers of clinics.

## Sanitation

Chickens will defecate anywhere and in everything, even their food and water. It is your role as a keeper to maintain a basic level of hygiene in the coop. Monitoring the level of cleanliness on a daily basis is a matter of public health, reducing odours (as per the nuisance by-law) and keeping your chickens healthy.

- **General:** Keeping shelter areas clean and dry will help prevent bacteria, fungi, insects, rodents, etc.
- Housing animals in spacious, clean and relatively dust free environments will keep them healthy and will minimize human exposure to infectious disease.
- **Daily Cleaning:** Manure and wet bedding should be removed from coop and animal feeding areas daily.
- **Annual Cleaning:** A thorough and complete cleaning of walls and perches, removal of all bedding and disinfecting of coop and furnishings should be done at least once a year.
- If your birds have been diagnosed with an illness, you will want to clean your entire coop and outdoor area before getting any new hens.
- Rodent levels will be minimized by keeping all feed in rodent proof containers and removing spilled or uneaten food promptly.
- Litter can be double bagged and disposed of as solid waste or composted but must be done in an area where chickens will not scratch for at least a year.

## SOURCES

- City of Vancouver, Animal Control:  
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/LICANDINSP/animalcontrol/chicken/index.htm>

## RESOURCES

- CNV Web page:  
TBD
- CLUCK North Vancouver:  
<http://chickensinnorthvancouver.wordpress.com/category/chickens-in-north-vancouver/>
- Maplewood Farm:  
<http://www.maplewoodfarm.bc.ca/>
- Urban chicken websites:
  - Back Yard Chickens.com: <http://www.backyardchickens.com/>
  - Urban Chickens.org: <http://urbanchickens.org/>
  - Daily Eggs.com: <http://www.dailyeggs.com/>
  - Village Vancouver: <http://www.villagevancouver.ca/>
  - City of Vancouver Backyard Hens Site:  
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/LICANDINSP/animalcontrol/chicken/index.htm>