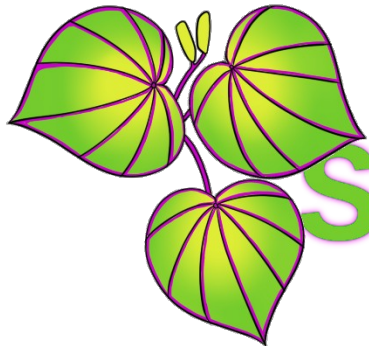
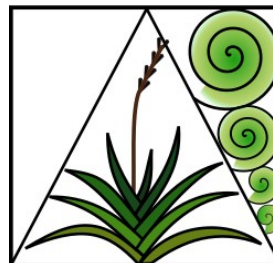


Poultry Care Workshop



SLOW FARM



RECAP
www.recap.org.nz

Why keep chickens?

- The outputs!
- Waste minimisation, circular economy
- Garden assistance
- Companionship
- Sustaining rare, unusual breeds
- Self-sufficiency
- Cottage business

The basics

- **Feed**
Variety is good.
- **Water**
Clean water is essential.
- **Shelter**
A place to sleep at night.

Shelter. Really.



Coop and run guidelines

- Keep out rain, wind
- Airflow for ventilation
- Keep out vermin, predators, and wild birds
- Cleaning and maintenance
- Site considerations: elevation and drainage
- Litter management

Stationary coop



“Portable” tractor



Better portable tractor



<https://shopjustinrhodes.com/products/free-chicken-tractor-plans>

Easy DIY dome



Plans at <https://recap.org.nz/tips>

Ergonomics

- Fixed house should allow easy access for cleaning
- PNCC requires solid floor, raised nib wall
- Perches up off the ground, all at same height
- Nest boxes at lower level than perches
- Movable designs not always practical for one person
- Bedding materials: shavings, wood chip, bark

The Run of the Place

- Permanent run attached to housing
- Rotational runs
- Tractors
- Free range
- Safety, convenience and nuisance considerations

Barriers

- Chicken wire – good, cheap, durable
- Bird netting to go across top
- They will squeeze under and through gaps
- Clip wings

Nesting instinct

- Nest boxes usually part of coop
- Make it easy to check for eggs
- Hens like dark, secluded spots
- Watch free rangers...they get creative
- Fake eggs help give hints

Food and drink

- Chickens are omnivores
- Protein important
- Fresh food is vital
- Variety is good
- Make sure they have “teeth”
- Calcium for laying hens
- Biochar improves gut health and deters internal parasites
- Clean water always available

How to get chickens

- Keep a rooster and nature does the work
- Fertile eggs (need a clucky hen or incubator)
- Chicks
- Point-of-lay pullets
- Excess from others' flocks
- Battery rescues
- Consider disease risk

Starting a flock





Behaviour

- Social structure is hierarchical
- Alpha hen or rooster at the top
- Changes in flock involve renegotiation
- Fighting looks worse than it actually is
- Make sure underdogs get what they need

Not all pecking is fighting

- Settled hens groom one another
- Watch for feather picking
- Wounded and sick birds often attacked
- A good rooster can keep up to 25-30 hens in stable social order



Down and dirty

- Dust or dirt bathing is essential
- Any spot that dries easily will work
- Can also provide basin filled with fine dirt/sand
- Wood ashes, diatomaceous earth may be added
- Getting wet not a problem for healthy birds

Seasonal considerations

- Spring and summer are productive period
- Day length, warmth, nutrition all factors
- Hot weather can stress chickens
- Autumn is time for moult and regrowth
- Winter typically low or zero egg production
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Clucky hens

- Great if you want chicks
- Not so good if you want eggs
- Cool them down to stop cycle
- Air circulation is a simple method

Catching and handling

- Gentle birds a real plus
- Handling is a good way to check health
- Flighty birds best approached at night
- Chook crook a handy tool
- Trap may be necessary for strays

What to look for

- Overall condition and behaviour
- Bright eyes, alertness
- Full, red and glossy comb, ears, wattles
- Feathers smooth – not fluffed or matted
- Good inspection video link on <http://recap.org.nz/tips>

Some health issues

- Mites and fleas
- Scaly leg
- Egg binding
- Tumours and growths
- Marek's disease

Bird flu

- It's here now and chickens are at risk
- Spread by wild birds, so exclusion is the best form of prevention
- Inspect your flock at least once a day and promptly remove any dead, sick, or droopy birds
- Bury or compost carcasses right away
- Keep coop and run clean
- Don't let pets have access to chicken quarters
- Pay attention to wild birds in your area
- Follow MPI biosecurity advice

Bird flu symptoms

- Lack of energy/reluctance to move
- Eating less than normal
- Droopy head
- Darkened and/or swollen comb/wattle
- Coughing, panting and runny nostrils
- Swelling around the head and neck
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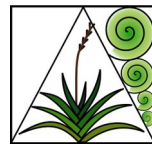
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- If it's sudden, necropsy may determine cause
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- Culling non producers, slaughter for meat
- **Please** don't dump in the bush

Q&A

- Other poultry
- Downloadable materials at

<https://recap.org.nz/tips>

Poultry Care Workshop



RECAP
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Welcome and thanks to RECAP, PNCC
Housekeeping
Introductions

Why keep chickens?

- The outputs!
- Waste minimisation, circular economy
- Garden assistance
- Companionship
- Sustaining rare, unusual breeds
- Self-sufficiency
- Cottage business

Two extremely useful things come out of a hen and one of them is eggs.

The Obvious Outputs: Eggs. Manure. Meat.

Feathers and down.

Waste reduction and closing loops: Kitchen scraps, weeds, spoiled produce

Soil building, weed and pest control, rotation with crops, lawnmowing, compost conditioning

Can be pets, have distinct personalities, entertaining, educational

Heritage breeds often need committed breeders to keep lines going

Satisfaction of maintaining your own source of food and services

Who knows? You might turn it into a nice little enterprise.

The basics

- **Feed**
Variety is good.
- **Water**
Clean water is essential.
- **Shelter**
A place to sleep at night.

Providing basic needs: food, water, shelter
Domesticated from jungle fowl of SE Asia, so originally a tropical species
Breeding has introduced adaptations for wide range of climates, but they're not waterproof and require housing
Shade in hot weather, protection from rain and wind, enclosed roosting spot for nights

Shelter. Really.



<aside> Winter 2011 and story of young pullets up
a tree in the snow

Coop and run guidelines

- Keep out rain, wind
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- Perches up off the ground, all at same height
- Nest boxes at lower level than perches
- Movable designs not always practical for one person
- Bedding materials: shavings, wood chip, bark

Permanent housing should be easy for you to get in and clean out. Solid floor desirable (req'd in PNCC bylaws)

Perches at same height if possible (not too high if you clip wings) – everyone will try to get on highest level anyway

Ventilation important but needs to be closed to harsh winds

Insulation not really an issue in NZ

Try to exclude mice, rats by not feeding in the coop and not letting litter accumulate

Deep litter method. You can use untreated sawdust or shavings at least 5 cm deep on floor. Droppings will mix in and begin composting. Can even add warmth – helpful in cold months. Requires some attention but does not need to be mucked out as often. Ammonia smell is cue for cleaning. Biochar helps with deep litter

The Run of the Place

- Permanent run attached to housing
- Rotational runs
- Tractors
- Free range
- Safety, convenience and nuisance considerations

Permanent run advantages: you know where they are, well protected, gardens safe

Disadvantages: can become mud pit when wet, smells, nothing grows, turns to crust when dry, not very fun for birds. You will need to provide all food, including greens, because they won't be able to forage. Management with wood chip or similar mulch essential, and as a bonus will provide worms for extra food

Rotational runs allow resting, regrowth, but require more space and a bit of management

Tractors let you move the chooks around the lawn or garden, cropping the grass, renovating beds and getting varied quarters and diet

Free range: birds love it but now you have to fence them out of gardens, play areas, wherever you don't want them. Dogs and cats may be an issue, and harriers in open country. If you're really unlucky and have stoats, you'll probably need a tight wire cage and a trapping regimen. Big downside: increased contact with wild birds, so much greater risk of disease

PNCC bylaws require adequate fencing so they don't stray.

Barriers

- Chicken wire – good, cheap, durable
- Bird netting to go across top
- They will squeeze under and through gaps
- Clip wings

Poultry netting = chicken wire. Large weave cheapest and stops all but small chicks. Wind or shade cloth, plastic fencing, woven bamboo or willow all work.

Peg down the bottom and wire together joins
Clipping wings will stop most flying behaviour, but if there is a perch at top of barrier a determined bird can still get over. Run a wire or netting above solid top to foil strong flyers

Nesting instinct

- Nest boxes usually part of coop
- Make it easy to check for eggs
- Hens like dark, secluded spots
- Watch free rangers...they get creative
- Fake eggs help give hints

Most coop designs have boxes either attached to or within the structure

Simple is usually best. Don't make boxes too big.

Line with clean straw, hay or shavings. Change when old or soiled. Put boxes lower than perch height and hens will be less likely to spend the night in them

Easy access so you can collect eggs.

Privacy seems to be important to most laying hens. If you have a row of boxes, make sure they're separated by panels high enough to prevent visual contact.

If your birds free range, look out. Some of them will insist on making their own nests (especially broody hens). Make sure there's no queuing forcing hens to look for another spot. You may need to lock them into the run from time to time in order to "reset" their laying habits.

Sometimes a fake egg or two will make a nest more desirable

Food and drink

- Chickens are omnivores
- Protein important
- Fresh food is vital
- Variety is good
- Make sure they have “teeth”
- Calcium for laying hens
- Biochar improves gut health and deters internal parasites
- Clean water always available

Wide tolerance of diet. Protein necessary, esp for laying birds and when growing feathers post moult.

Grains and seeds are good staple feed

Fresh green matter is important. If they don't have access to grass and herbaceous feed, you should give them some daily.

Any sort of kitchen scraps, garden waste, spoiled fruit all are great. Free range chooks have advantage in this department. Let them go through the compost heap for fun (and bugs and worms).

Gravel and grit are essential...these are the chicken's teeth and need to be replenished constantly.

Calcium is crucial nutrient, esp for laying hens. Shell grit, crushed eggshells and greens good sources.

They need a reliable source of water, especially after feeding. Some people put cider vinegar in the water occasionally – this may help with parasite burdens and general health.

How to get chickens

- Keep a rooster and nature does the work
- Fertile eggs (need a clucky hen or incubator)
- Chicks
- Point-of-lay pullets
- Excess from others' flocks
- Battery rescues
- Consider disease risk

Of course, this gets you back to chicken/egg conundrum

Suppliers of eggs: commercial breeders, hobbyists. Trademe good place to look.

Don't have a clucky hen? Incubators can be bought or built

Hatched chicks can be transported for first two days as they are still living off yolk.

Need a brood box to rear chicks until they're ready for outdoors. This depends on breed as well as weather and shelter, but minimum 4-6 weeks.

5-month-old pullets are ready to go and simple way to start productive flock. Commercial breeders and hobbyists again are sources.

Good to inspect source flock if buying excess or culls, be able to tell relative age of birds

Battery rescues like rolling dice

Disease and behaviour considerations always apply, esp when adding new birds to established flock. Quarantine for 2 weeks as a rule

Starting a flock





Behaviour

- Social structure is hierarchical
- Alpha hen or rooster at the top
- Changes in flock involve renegotiation
- Fighting looks worse than it actually is
- Make sure underdogs get what they need

Pecking order is subtle

The top chicken will often intervene if two others fight

Sufficient space important – crowding increases altercations (battery operators trim beaks to minimise damage to birds)

Introduction of new birds, loss or demotion of high-ranking chicken leads to a round of sorting out. This is mostly posturing but sometimes a scrappy hen asks for trouble and gets it

The only time fighting leads to serious injury is between mature roosters...rarely an issue with backyard flocks, but if you're on a lifestyle block and someone dumps roosters nearby you will need to deal with it

Birds at the bottom may get crowded out from feeding and perches – make sure resources are adequate for all

Not all pecking is fighting

- Settled hens groom one another
- Watch for feather picking
- Wounded and sick birds often attacked
- A good rooster can keep up to 25-30 hens in stable social order

Grooming often consists of repeated gentle pecking, usually around the head. You'll know it's OK when nobody tries to get away

Feather picking a sign of protein deficiency, especially during moult – supplement feed, sequester the offenders and cull if necessary

Quarantine droopy birds or those with open wounds or sores until healed, as blood incites cannibalism and instinct can cause chickens to destroy sick or injured



Down and dirty

- Dust or dirt bathing is essential
- Any spot that dries easily will work
- Can also provide basin filled with fine dirt/sand
- Wood ashes, diatomaceous earth may be added
- Getting wet not a problem for healthy birds

Dust baths cool chickens on warm days, keep feathers and skin in good condition, control mites
Also help with socialisation and bonding

Covered spot is good, but a well-drained location that gets sun and dries out quickly will often be chosen

Can dig a shallow pit and backfill with screened dirt and fine sand

Add ashes or diatomaceous earth to give extra effectiveness against mites and pests

Chickens will sometimes stand in rain if not too cold, and this cleans them up nicely. If one doesn't seek shelter and gets soaked, it may be sick and need intervention

Seasonal considerations

- Spring and summer are productive period
- Day length, warmth, nutrition all factors
- Hot weather can stress chickens
- Autumn is time for moult and regrowth
- Winter typically low or zero egg production
- Give dry place to stand in prolonged cold & wet

Heavy breeds in particular can suffer in heat. Make sure they have shade and air circulation, along with plenty of water.

Egg production will cease during moult and feather regrowth. Watch for feather picking.

Winter is down time, but well-fed chooks may continue laying at reduced rate. Artificial light will promote egg production...but do you want to work your hens this hard? They will only lay a fixed number of eggs in a lifetime.

Don't let chooks stand around in water and muck, esp in cold weather. Add extra wood chips or organic matter to get them up off the ground, and improve drainage if necessary

Clucky hens

- Great if you want chicks
- Not so good if you want eggs
- Cool them down to stop cycle
- Air circulation is a simple method

If you want to augment flock or replace birds, letting a broody hen do her thing is easy method

Best to move to a separate area, introduce eggs

In free range situations you are likely to have hidden clutches, so be vigilant esp in spring, early summer

Broody behaviour is contagious, and since they monopolise the nest boxes your laying hens may be put off

To dissuade a clucky hen you need to lower body temp

One method was dunking in cold water: “madder than a wet hen”

Putting in a cage in shady spot with air movement all around (esp underneath) will cool down and usually break the impulse in 24-48 hours

Once they give up the mommy track career option, they usually resume laying in about a week.

Catching and handling

- Gentle birds a real plus
- Handling is a good way to check health
- Flighty birds best approached at night
- Chook crook a handy tool
- Trap may be necessary for strays

Hand-reared birds will often let you pick them up

Frequent handling reinforces tameness and makes chickens easy to manage.

Some chooks refuse to come quietly, so you'll have to chase and corner or have devices at your disposal <example of crook>

OR...simple method...wait until night, go out to the coop when it's dark and get them with a torch

If you're in country and have to deal with dumped birds a trap may be the only option

What to look for

- Overall condition and behaviour
- Bright eyes, alertness
- Full, red and glossy comb, ears, wattles
- Feathers smooth – not fluffed or matted
- Good inspection video link on <http://recap.org.nz/tips>

Healthy birds look and act healthy

Alertness may be compromised if you sneak up on them at night, so take this into account

Laying hens will have bright red comb, ears, wattles

Matted feathers are a sign of ill thrift. Fluffing often presents with hunched or stiff aspect and indicates a sick chicken

Youtube a good resource for videos

Some health issues

- Mites and fleas
- Scaly leg
- Egg binding
- Tumours and growths
- Marek's disease

Mites are a common issue in our climate. Dust baths and frequent litter changes are the best preventative measures. Wood vinegar can be used to spray coop surfaces.

Scaly leg is a fungal infection and can be treated by rubbing with oil or soaking with dilute vinegar solution. Some breeds are more prone than others

Egg binding can happen if calcium levels are low. Interventions include warm baths and keeping the hen in a warm, dark place to stimulate the laying muscles. Don't try to force the egg out, or wait more than one day before seeking veterinary help

Tumours and growths can spread quickly in an otherwise healthy bird. Be prepared to dispatch humanely

Marek's is a viral infection and inevitable where wild birds are about. Symptoms are usually paralysis, starting with limping or a dropped wing and progressing to full rigour. Some affected birds recover.

Bird flu

- It's here now and chickens are at risk
- Spread by wild birds, so exclusion is the best form of prevention
- Inspect your flock at least once a day and promptly remove any dead, sick, or droopy birds
- Bury or compost carcasses right away
- Keep coop and run clean
- Don't let pets have access to chicken quarters
- Pay attention to wild birds in your area
- Follow MPI biosecurity advice

Avoiding contact with wild birds is the best policy

Limit feeding times and amounts and use netting to keep from attracting sparrows

Virus is shed in litter, so more frequent cleanouts will be necessary

Bird flu symptoms

- Lack of energy/reluctance to move
- Eating less than normal
- Droopy head
- Darkened and/or swollen comb/wattle
- Coughing, panting and runny nostrils
- Swelling around the head and neck
- Laying fewer eggs than normal
- Watery or green diarrhoea
- Bruises on body and legs
- A silent hen house

End of the line

- Sooner or later you'll lose a chook
- If it's sudden, necropsy may determine cause
- What will you do with old or sick birds?
- Culling non producers, slaughter for meat
- **Please** don't dump in the bush

Good idea to think about loss of chickens

If you can, necropsy is useful for ascribing the cause of mortality and can help you prevent more deaths

If one dies of disease, dispose of it away from flock. Bury at least 20 cm deep or put in middle of active compost pile.

If chooks are old and in obvious decline, dispatch is most humane response. Learn to do this or have someone you can take the birds to.

Some poultry keepers will cull when production drops. If the chicken is healthy there's no reason not to eat it. Also the case if you rear chicks – you'll wind up with half roosters.

Whatever you do, please don't take them out and release them in the bush or in a paddock somewhere.

Q&A

- Other poultry
- Downloadable materials at

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