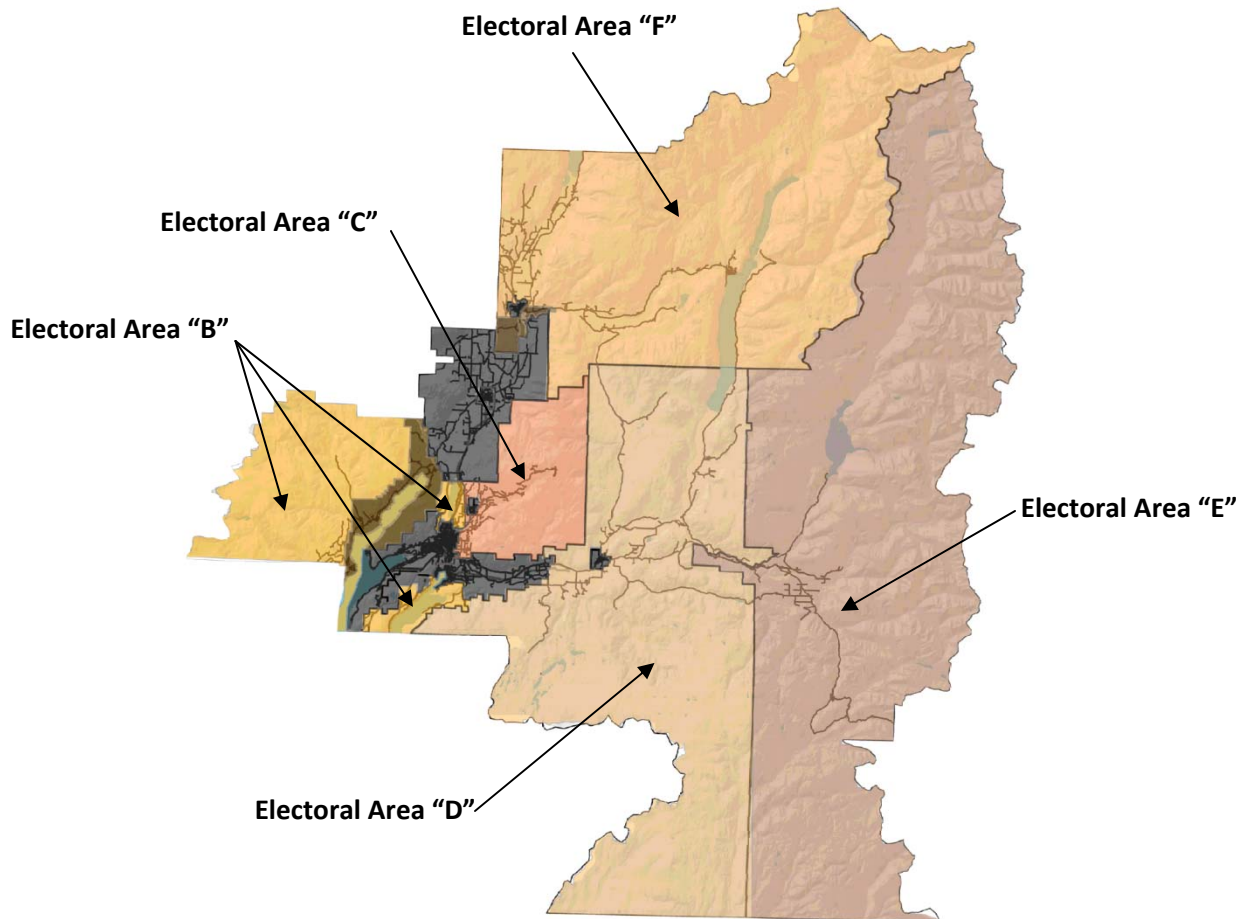


GUIDE TO BACKYARD CHICKENS/LAYING HENS IN ELECTORAL AREAS

In recent years, many communities across British Columbia have allowed for the keeping of backyard chickens on small residential lots. As part of the Regional District’s overall efforts to promote food security and small lot agriculture activities in our communities, the Regional District Zoning Bylaw was amended on February 6, 2013 to permit Electoral Area residents to keep backyard female chickens (also known as hens) on most rural and residential properties.

As an owner of backyard hens, 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. This guide has been provided to assist you deciding whether or not you would like to keep hens and offers guidance on what you need to know to be a responsible chicken keeper.

You can keep chickens in Electoral Areas “B”, “C”, “D”, “E” and “F” if you meet the requirements. If you live in the City of Armstrong, District of Coldstream, City of Enderby, Village of Lumby, Township of Spallumcheen and City of Vernon, please contact your municipal hall to ask about policy regarding backyard chickens.



BACKYARD HENS Q & A

Am I allowed to keep backyard hens on my property?

You are able to keep backyard hens on any Electoral Area residential or rural property (with the exception of Silver Star) that does not allow restricted, limited or intensive agricultural use, contains a single family dwelling or manufactured home and is zoned Rural or Residential (except properties zoned Residential Manufactured Home Community (R.5)). Please contact the Regional District if you are unsure that backyard hens are allowed on your property.

Will roosters be allowed or just hens? What about ducks, geese, turkeys and other fowl?

The Zoning Bylaw only allows for the keeping of female chickens (hens) four months of age or older on most Electoral Area residential and rural lots that do not have agricultural as an allowable usage. No other fowl or farm animals are allowed.

Will there be limits on the number of hens that can be kept?

A maximum of four hens may be kept on properties that are under 1 acre in size and up to ten hens may be kept on properties 1 acre or larger in size, provided that there is available space and placement of the coop meets the requirements set out in Regional District of North Okanagan Zoning Bylaw No. 1888, 2003 (<http://www.rdno.ca/bylaws/1888.pdf>).

Do I need a coop to keep backyard chickens?

Yes, you will need a coop to house your hens. The Zoning Bylaw requires that coops are designed and sited in a specific way, with:

- A minimum of 0.37 m² floor area per hen, with a maximum floor area of 9.2 square metres (100 square feet) for the coop.
- The coop's height cannot be more than 2 metres (6.56 feet).
- The coop needs to be not closer than 3 metres (9.8 feet) from any door or window of any dwelling and can only be located at the rear or side of a single family dwelling.
- The coop needs to be setback from your property line by at least 2 metres (6.56 feet).

If your property is less than one acre in size, you will need to also provide a run with a minimum floor area of 0.92 m² per hen, which is a fenced in area where your hens can roam.

If you are planning a chicken coop (not including the run) that has a building area larger than 10 m², you may need a building permit. Please contact the Regional District of North Okanagan Building Inspection team to confirm building permit requirements.

There are many resources that can provide guidance on best practices when designing your coop and several portable coops with runs that you can purchase.



Will residents be able to sell eggs from backyard hens?

No. Commercial use of eggs, meats, manure or any other hen products is prohibited. The products from backyard hens are for personal use only.

Will people be able to slaughter chickens or are they just for eggs?

Backyard slaughtering is not prohibited, although best practices for taking a hen to a farm that is permitted to slaughter poultry or to a veterinarian that can euthanize hens. Please dispose of chicken carcases appropriately and call the Regional District if you are unsure of the appropriate disposal method.

How many eggs does one hen lay per day?

This depends on many factors including the time of year, the breed, diet and age of the hen. Most of the standard breeds of chickens selected for egg production will lay between 180-320 eggs per year in their first year of laying. Roosters are not necessary for egg production.

Can my hens run around the yard? Do I need to keep them fenced in?

If you have a property that is a minimum of one acre, you can allow your hens to free range, but care must be taken to protect them from predators or entering a neighbor's property. Therefore, they should be fenced or housed in most of the time, especially at night. If your property is less than one acre, you will need to keep your hens in your coop and run (pen) at all times.

How long do they lay eggs before they become non-laying hens?

At about three or four years, production is not very efficient. Most commercial and farm hens are culled after their second season of laying.

How do I deal with excrement?

Chicken manure makes excellent compost when combined with material high in carbon. Many materials used for litter in the coop and run (such as wood shavings, straw and sawdust) are high in carbon, making the mixture of chicken manure and litter a balanced ingredient for your compost pile.



HEN BASICS

The following information was compiled from a list of sources provided at the end of this document. This information should be used as a starting point for understanding the best management practices for the keeping of chickens in on small (< 1 hectare) residential and rural lots. The following information is not intended to be exhaustive; inclusion as a resource in no way is intended to represent an endorsement by the Regional District of North Okanagan or a warranty as to the accuracy of the information that is included in 'Hen Basics'.

When planning to introduce backyard chicken into your family, it is recommended that you explore the extensive literature on the subject and talk with your friends and neighbours about their experiences with backyard chickens.

- Chickens are ground dwelling birds, but can fly for short distances. They are very social creatures that depend on one another for companionship and security. Chickens can live 14 years or more.
- Laying hens need approximately 15 hours of light a day in order to keep laying. You may wish to provide an artificial light source during the darker winter months or you may wish to give your hen the natural break during the winter.
- Egg laying for a hen generally starts at 6 months old. Domesticated hens have been bred to lay one egg a day, but by 18 months of age, egg laying generally diminishes and many adult or senior hens stop laying altogether. Purebred chickens or heritage breeds tend to lay eggs longer.
- The majority of a hen's waking hours are spent active, grazing, foraging for food (plants, bugs and occasionally small rodents), dust bathing, preening, playing and napping.

Daily Care:

Chickens need to be fed and water changed daily. They need to be let out of the coop each morning and put into the coop at dusk each night to protect them from predators. Eggs should be picked up twice a day. The coop and pen should be cleaned out weekly to maintain sanitation and odor control. Chickens drink 1 - 2 cups of water a day.

Diet:

Chickens are omnivores. They eat grains, fruits, and vegetables as well as insects. Chickens should typically be fed a prepared feed that is balanced for vitamins, minerals, and protein. A healthy laying hen diet should also contain crushed oystershell for egg production, and grit for digestion. A six pound hen will eat roughly 3 pounds of feed each week.

They love fruit and vegetable scraps from the kitchen and garden, as well as bread.



Feed consumption may increase in the winter when burning more calories, and decrease in the heat of the summer. A critical part of a chicken's diet is continual access to clean, fresh water. This is especially true in the summer as they cool themselves by panting.

Social Needs:

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. 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.

Veterinary Care:

Locate a veterinary clinic nearby that will see chickens before one is needed, preferably one that specializes in avian care.

Sanitation:

It is your role as a keeper of backyard chickens to maintain a basic level of hygiene in the coop. An important element to bird health is sanitation. In order to maintain a clean, healthy environment, the coop and outdoor area should be cleaned out weekly, or as needed, to control manure and odor build up. Feed and water containers should be regularly cleaned and disinfected. Dust baths should be available to help control mites.

It is important that at least once a year, usually in the spring, a thorough cleaning is done on the coop and yard. Also cleaning before introducing new birds to the area will limit the spread of disease. A fall cleaning is also helpful for mite control over winter. During this cleaning, safety precautions must be taken in dealing with dust. Inhalation of dried chicken manure can be harmful to humans.

Composting:

One benefit of keeping chickens, besides the egg production and pet enjoyment, is the resulting chicken manure that, after composting, will give your garden a high-energy dose of nutrients. Chicken manure straight from the chicken, however, is too high in nitrogen for delicate plants, and can burn them. Aging chicken manure by composting reduces the nitrogen content and provides a balance of nutrients.

Humane Treatment:

When keeping backyard hens, please be aware of the proper and humane treatment of your birds. There are many resources on the proper care of backyard hens.



The Regional District does not regulate the treatment of backyard hens. The appropriate care and wellbeing of animals is covered by Provincial regulations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. Under the Act, a person that causes or permits an animal to be or to continue to be in distress commits an offence. An animal is considered in distress if it is:

- deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, space, care or veterinary treatment;
- injured, sick, in pain or suffering; or,
- abused or neglected.

The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BCSPCA) is responsible for the enforcement of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, as it relates to the well being of backyard chickens. Please refer to the BCSPCA website for information on humane treatment of backyard hens.

Costs to consider:

Besides construction of a chicken coop and pen and purchase of the hens, start up costs also include food storage, security locks, lighting, and feed & water dishes. Ongoing costs include building maintenance & cleaning, bedding, food, nutritional supplements, parasite control, grooming, vet care, and care when you are away over a long period of time.

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 or yard, ensure sufficient food & water are provided and clean the coop (if necessary). You should provide adequate supplies for the evening and make sure that all hens are securely confined overnight.

You will need to set aside time for:

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

During vacations and weekends away, you should have someone fully attend to your hens.

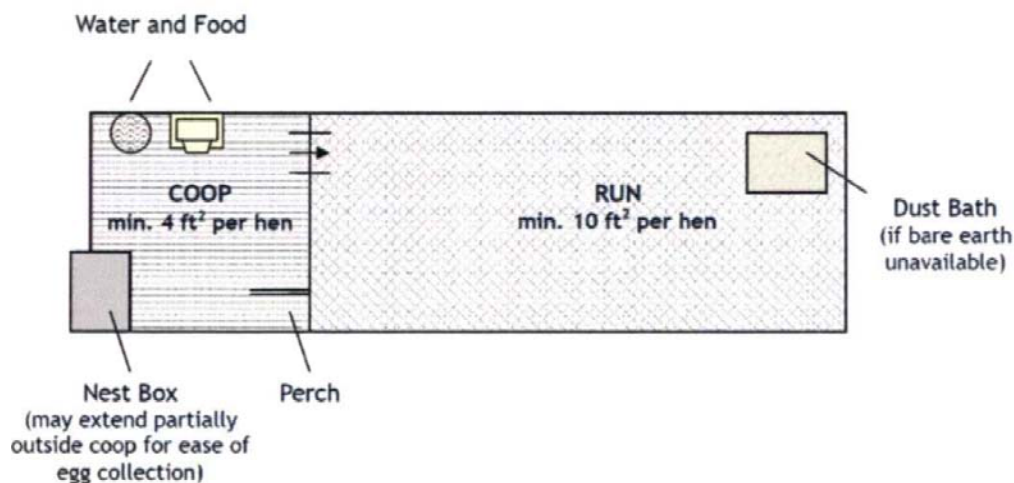
Coop:

A quality coop is essential to backyard hen production. Laying hens need nest boxes—one per three or four birds. Chickens are descended from jungle birds, which mean they like to be up high, so a place for them to roost is important. Coops must provide protection from the weather and predators. There should be a well insulated area with a light bulb or heat lamp for the winter months as well as ventilation for fresh air.

An enclosed space for them to stay at night is essential to their protection from predators. Ensure that the coop is free of small holes for predators to sneak in. There is an endless variety



of coop designs with just as much range in cost. There are many books and websites with coop designs. The schematic below shows a simple chicken coop schematic.



Biosecurity Requirements:

Bio-security procedures, as recommended by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), should be followed by owners of backyard chickens. Bio-security procedures are recommended by poultry care experts as necessary to prevent the spread of avian flu and other diseases among chickens and their caregivers. These include:

- Preventing contact with wild birds and other animals;
- Cleaning enclosures and equipment routinely and thoroughly;
- Cleaning clothes, hands, and footwear before and after handling birds;
- Spotting the signs of disease and reporting disease early;
- Limiting visitor access to birds;
- Requiring visitors to practice bio-security measures;
- Segregating new hens for at least 30 days;
- Segregating hens that have been at shows for at least two weeks; and,
- Obtaining hens from reputable suppliers.

Be a Good Backyard Hen-Keeping Neighbor:

- Chickens do not respect property lines and can cause damage to your neighbor's garden and property. Keep your chickens enclosed or confined to your property.
- Properly dispose of used hen litter. Improper composting or storage may create excessive odor and fly problems that may affect your neighbours.
- Although in most circumstances chickens pose a relatively low risk of giving disease to humans, there are a few infections that can be transmitted back and forth. Proper care and handling of eggs and disposal of poultry carcasses are critical to avoid problems. Please check with the Regional District of North Okanagan Waste Management team to confirm the proper disposal of hen carcasses.

RESOURCES

The Regional District of North Okanagan provides this resource list impartially and for convenience only. The Regional District does not intend or believe that this resource list is exhaustive, and the Regional District does not have any knowledge and makes no representations and give no warranties as to the suitability, quality or accuracy of any information, products or services in any way published or publicized directly or indirectly through the literature or internet sites listed here.

Some Backyard Hen Book Resources:

Chickens In Your Backyard: A Beginner's Guide by Rick Luttmann

Chicken Tractor: The Permaculture Guide to Happy Hens and Healthy Soil by Andy Lee and Pat Foreman

Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens: Care / Feeding / Facilities by Gail Damerow

Keeping Chickens: The Essential Guide by Jeremy Hobson, Celia Lewis

Living with Chickens: Everything You Need to Know to Raise Your Own Backyard Flock by Jay Rossier

Management Guide for the Backyard Flock. Jean E. Sander, Extension Veterinarian and Michael P. Lacy, Extension Poultry Scientist Cooperative Extension Service. The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Revised by Claudia Dunkley, Extension Poultry Scientist. 2009.

Some Internet Resources:

The following web resources offer guidance and tips. (List current as of February 2012). Although not a comprehensive list of web resources, this information will get you started on exploring backyard hen best management practices.

<http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/poultry/factsheets.htm>

BC Ministry of Agriculture poultry facts sheets and publication list.

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/animae.shtml>

Protecting backyard flocks from disease. Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Government of Canada: Regulations, Activities & Information.

<http://www.chickencrossing.org/coopis.html>

Chicken basics dedicated to the pet chicken owner.



<http://www.backyardpoultrymag.com>

This is an online magazine that is published by-monthly with feature articles and articles from a list of departments including: Breed Selection; Housing; Management; and Health and Nutrition.

<http://poultryone.com/>

This is a site that gives general information on “starting out” and provides a forum for people to write about their experience and to ask questions.

<http://www.backyardchickens.com/>

A website devoted to the keeping of backyard chickens, including best management practices and coop design.

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/Sustainable-Farming.aspx>

Mother Earth News Magazine web articles that provide information on backyard chickens.