

Housing Poultry

The main problem with many housing systems is that they are too small in size for the amount of birds they are designed for and are not always easy to access and disinfect. A house that is well ventilated, fully accessible and easy to clean and disinfect (removable parts can help with this) is ideal.

Poultry accommodation must provide shelter from the wind and rain and also protection and safety from predators. Chickens do like to perch, but make sure that any perches are not be placed too high off the ground as they can cause injury. A darkened area should be provided for nesting.

Bedding should be clean and dry, wood shavings are considered to be the best bedding material, but it is advisable to regularly remove droppings and wet areas. If allowed to build up, it increases the amount of bacteria and moulds, which not only greatly affects the air quality in the coop but can also taint any eggs. You should aim to clean all of the bedding out every 1-2 weeks in a small hen house.

Feeders and drinkers should be provided at all times. Chickens do like drinking off surfaces (puddles, plates) but contamination of water is a problem and can harbour disease. Many drinkers and feeders on the market have mechanisms to prevent contamination, so shop around for the one that suits your set up the best. It is important to make sure these drinkers are scrubbed clean regularly as bacterial films can form on the surfaces and cause disease.

Chickens love digging and scratching around in the mud. Providing a dust bath of sand and an outside range area will provide lots of stimulation and enrichment and make sure that your chickens are kept happy and healthy.

If creating an enclosure for your chickens the fence height should be at least 2m with 30cm buried underground to prevent them digging themselves out. The mesh can be ready made 5cm chicken or other alternatives.

Some people allow their chickens to have free range of the garden. Just remember that chickens love to dig. The loose soil of your vegetable patch is a favourite for digging up worms and any prized veg that get in the way! If adopt this free-range approach, it is advised that you protect any areas with netting or fencing.

You will need to shut your chickens in at night, not only to keep them warm and dry, but also to keep predators away. Most chickens will naturally go inside to roost when the sun goes down, but having chickens about will attract vermin and predators, so keeping things clean and secure will help to prevent any problems.

Many people use manual systems to close pop-holes in their coops, but there are also timed automatic systems available that either work by a set time or the available daylight.

