

Backyard Chickens (Hens) & Ducks

Jefferson County allows the keeping of chickens and ducks in most single family detached and duplex zone districts under certain conditions. A miscellaneous permit needs to be obtained from the County's Planning and Zoning division prior to keeping any chickens or ducks on the property. This guide discusses additional items that should be considered when deciding to keep chickens and ducks.

Benefits

There are many benefits to raising backyard chickens and ducks. These animals not only provide fresh, organic eggs everyday but also rich manure for gardening, hours of entertainment, and education for children on how to properly care for animals and where their food comes from.

Considerations

Noise

Hens are generally quiet, but may make a lot of noise after they have laid an egg. Their "egg song" will typically last only a few minutes but can be quite disturbing. Hens always lay during the daylight and not at night while most people are sleeping, but this is something to consider.

Adult ducks are generally quiet, but may "chatter" or make other audible noises if agitated or alarmed.

Initial set-up

The initial setup of the coop and run can be costly and take significant time and planning. Before buying the chickens, ducks, and construction materials, make sure to plan for the costs of all the materials required, the amount of time it takes to build a secure coop, and the dedication to care for these birds.

Long term plan

Chickens lay the most eggs the first two years of their lives. Ducks often lay more regularly and are not as likely as chickens to go broody (stop laying eggs) when they are content and have a companion. Consider what to do with the birds after they are less productive, especially since slaughtering is not allowed on-site by County regulations.

Neighbors

Neighbors may not be as enthusiastic about chickens and ducks as the person raising them. Consider the impact these animals will have on surrounding neighbors during the initial planning process. Be sure to check with the area Homeowners' Association for any restrictive covenants that may prevent keeping chickens or ducks on private property.

Talking to neighbors about the desire to have these birds is always advised. Be a positive example of backyard chicken and duck keeping and mitigate any negative impact these animals may have on neighbors.

Coop and run construction

Protect the animals from the elements, predators, injury, and theft through a safe and secure coop.

Coop Placement

Coops should be draft-free with windows/doors that can be opened to allow for ventilation. Coops should be placed on a high, well drained area to prevent prolonged dampness. The front of the coop should also be southern facing to allow for maximum sun exposure. It is highly recommended that shade be provided in the summer; chickens are very sensitive to hot temperatures, while ducks are better able to manage hot temperatures with a provided pond or water source. Also consider providing heat in the winter.

Predator Resistant

Coops should be surrounded by an enclosed run. It is recommended that the mesh wiring be no less than 1 by 2 inch. To prevent digging predators the wire mesh should be buried 2 foot deep with a 2 foot apron surrounding it. To prevent flying predators the run should include an overhead enclosure as well. The animals should be locked in their coop every evening and be let out into the run every morning. Keeping the coop clean will also eliminate odors that draw predators.

Sanitation

Manure Management

The coop and run should be cleaned once a week to prevent odors. Any feed the birds scatter around the coop and run should be cleaned daily to prevent vermin. For chickens, hanging the feeder from the ceiling at the birds shoulder height will make it almost impossible for the animals to scratch and scatter food.

Food Storage

Food should be stored in a secure container off of the floor to prevent vermin from being attracted to the coop and taking up residence. Metal containers can sweat, promoting the growth of mildew. A plastic container is advised.

Salmonella

It is common for poultry to carry Salmonella. Salmonella is a type of germ that naturally lives in the intestines of poultry. To prevent a Salmonella infection hands should always be washed with soap and water immediately after touch-

ing live poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam. Any eggs laid by the birds should also be washed thoroughly before eating. Adults should supervise young children when handling or touching the birds. Do not eat or drink in the area where the animals live or roam.

Birds next door

When hearing a neighbor is going to keep chickens and ducks, there may be some anxiousness felt regarding a potential for an increase in odors, noise, predators, and pests. Chickens and ducks are birds of prey so they are naturally very quiet animals. During the night the birds should be silent. If a coop is properly maintained there should not be any additional odors or increase in pests. A clean and secure coop will also help to ward off predators.

If odors or pests are noticed, consider talking to the neighbor keeping the birds. They would mostly likely want everyone to enjoy their animals just as much as they do. It may be surprising at how eager they are to resolve any issues that come up. If issues persist, contact Jefferson County Planning & Zoning at 303-271-8700 to register a complaint.

Definitions

Chicken: a domestic fowl, *Gallus domesticus*, descended from various jungle fowl of south-eastern Asia and developed in a number of breeds for its flesh, eggs, and feathers.

Duck: a domestic fowl, *Anas platyrhynchos domesticus* or *Cairina moschata forma domestica*, descended from various wild duck species worldwide and developed in a number of breeds for its flesh, eggs, and feathers.

Resources

CSU Extension Sustainable Small Acreage News
www.ext.colostate.edu/sam

Center for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/Features/SalmonellaPoultry/

Colorado Poultry Association
<http://www.coloradopoultryassociation.com/>

National Poultry Improvement Plan (NFIP)
www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_dis_spec/poultry/

National Agricultural Library
<https://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/urban-agriculture>