

Raising Chickens in the Backyard



Backyard Chicken Coop¹

Keeping chickens in the backyard is beneficial for those who choose to do it because it provides a way to live more sustainably, the chickens provide fresh and great-tasting eggs (better than regular store-bought or “organic/free range” store-bought eggs), the chickens also provide pest control, and excellent manure for composting, which is great to use when growing plants and vegetables. The keeping of backyard chickens can fit well with neighborhoods and communities, as they make excellent pets, are relatively clean animals, and are quiet. There are also efficient ways for homeowners to keep their chicken coops and yards sanitary.

¹ <http://www.google.com/imgres?um=1&hl=en&sa=N&biw=1280&bih=935&tbn=isch&tbnid=3z3nTtag4DwP7M:&imgrefurl=http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/eating-locally-backyard-chickens.html&docid=7Lj-JD0Smxm11M&imgurl=http://media.treehugger.com/assets/images/2011/10/Urban-chicken-coop.jpg&w=468&h=461&ei=ET2UUNjHBauWjAKCpYHICA&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=298&sig=11506763726227746455&page=1&tbnh=141&tbnw=148&sart=0&ndsp=25&ved=1t:429,r:3,s:0,i:94&tx=59&ty=91>



Young Girl with Two Chickens²

I was able to interview three different people who are advocating the legalization of backyard chicken-keeping in Arizona cities as an intern at Valley Permaculture Alliance (a non-profit in Phoenix concerned with many aspects of sustainability). The impression that I got from my interviewees was that chickens are friendly pets, produce delicious eggs, provide pest control, and provide gardening help in many ways. One of my interviewees, who has chickens, said that chickens have “incredible personalities” and that they are “happy to see [her] when [she] gets home” (Launi Andrews, member of Valley Permaculture Alliance’s Tour de Coups planning committee and chicken enthusiast). She advocates the use of the fresh, organic eggs that her hens provide as they have a flavor that nothing can surpass. Additionally the manure that her hen’s produce is high in nitrogen which makes her compost hotter and therefore better. Compost is what you get when you take leftover food scraps, mulch, and sometimes

² http://www.google.com/imgres?um=1&hl=en&sa=N&biw=1280&bih=935&tbn=isch&tbnid=ohcjSIBez-lf-M:&imgrefurl=http://www.diaryofalocavore.com/2011/03/local-food-report-backyard-chickens.html&docid=ZKbkT3FgkKNgKM&imgurl=http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-qF8qAE0oxfo/TYsky_NSh9I/AAAAAAAAAdI/wFqWturl5ko/s400/IMG_0666.JPG&w=400&h=400&ei=ET2UUNjHBauWjAKCpYHICA&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=289&sig=115067637262277746455&page=2&tbnh=132&tbnw=138&start=25&ndsp=30&ved=1t:429,r:32,s:20,i:245&tx=99&ty=59

manure and put them in a pile or container for a period of time to create soil that contains many good nutrients for gardening. Compost has better and more nutrients than any store-bought soil. This makes the vegetables and plants that grow from it have more nutrients and a more delicious flavor as well.

Laura Deynes, from Wish We Had Acres Farm, a non-profit organization in Phoenix, Arizona, said that her top three favorite things about having chickens is the eggs, the companionship, and the manure, which is very good for composting. Renu Sidhu, a Chandler resident who would like to have backyard chickens, said that chickens are quiet and that they have what is called a “laying song,” which happens when the hens are laying eggs. A misconception about chicken-keeping is that you need a rooster for the hens to produce eggs and roosters are too loud. Although it is true that roosters are very loud and will wake you up in the early morning, they are not required for hens to lay eggs.³ Roosters are only required for producing eggs that will hatch chicks. Denyes is quick to point out that three chickens are more quiet than one dog and that chickens produce less manure than dogs. So if dogs are louder than chickens and are allowed to be kept as pets in cities, then why not chickens? In a blog for chicken owners⁴, I learned that sometimes one of the chickens can be loud. This happens because one of the hens wants to assert dominance over the other hens so she clucks louder than the others. However, this can easily be fixed with simple discipline. One commenter responded that he pins the dominant chicken in one spot and as she runs by, pats her bottom with a broom. This shows the other chickens that she is not clucking so loudly and that the other hens should not do the same.

In order for the cities to compensate for what some deem as negative aspects of chicken-keeping, a recommendation would be to post information on the city website or newsletter about how to raise or manage urban chickens properly and to provide recommended websites, like Chickenhop.com, which actually has sound clips where one can hear chicken calls, and books, like Rachel Bess' *Fowl Play, Chickens in Your Backyard: A Beginner's Guide* by Gail Luttmann, and *Free-Range Chicken Gardens: How to Create a Beautiful, Chicken-Friendly Yard* by Jessi Bloom so that citizens can learn how to avoid noise issues and any other issues that may arise. Another way to keep dominant chickens from being loud is to not have any dominant chickens at all and to be the mother hen yourself.⁵

Despite the many beneficial aspects of raising backyard chickens some cities have classified raising chickens as a misdemeanor. Sidhu knows some people who got caught with chickens in Chandler. She says that they were charged with a class one misdemeanor and that the cases that came before them were cases that included

³ *Fowl Play*

⁴ <http://littlehouseinthesuburbs.com/2010/01/noisy-hens.html>

⁵ *Chickenhop.com* by Zoben, “Raising Chickens: Flock Behavior,” <http://www.chickenhop.com/info/flock.html>

prostitution and other activities that causes harm to others. Most people who raise backyard chickens agree that a class one misdemeanor is too harsh for the simple act of raising backyard chickens. If chickens are not to be allowed then the punishment for having them should certainly be more lenient as the act of raising chickens do not hurt people nor the community.

Those who keep chickens do so with ease and pleasure. Keeping chickens has become very popular because of the local food movement. People want to know where their food comes from. In Bess' book, *Foul Play*, she explains how to properly care for chickens while maintaining a clean and sanitary coop environment, free of pests.



Chickens in a Coop⁶

Some concerns that the cities hold about allowing backyard chickens is that they might foster flies and other unsanitary bugs, that chickens make too much noise, that chickens will provide offensive neighborhood odors that would be sensed by neighboring citizens, that people will slaughter the chickens and cook them for meals, or that chickens leave too many droppings in yards. I assure you that proper policies may be placed in order to deter all of these possible outcomes of chicken-keeping.

⁶ [http://www.google.com/imgres?](http://www.google.com/imgres?um=1&hl=en&sa=N&biw=1280&bih=935&tbm=isch&tbnid=P4fRPTeMa3azQM:&imgrefurl=http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PDXBackyardChix/&docid=6HIUzQKCu6wEmM&imgurl=http://xa.yimg.com/kq/groups/15190113/homepage/name/homepage.jpg%253Ftype%253Dsn&w=480&h=320&ei=ET2UUNjHBauWjAKCpYHICA&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=281&sig=11506763726227746455&page=1&tbnh=141&tbnw=227&start=0&ndsp=25&ved=1t:429,r:12,s:0,i:121&tx=107&ty=82)

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Without roosters or dominant hens chickens are relatively quite. Bess covers numerous methods to keeping coops clean to avoid bugs and odors. Some cities are taking proactive measures to deter negative impacts of raising chickens. For example, in Gilbert, even though the ordinance requires 20,000 square feet per 25 chickens, the requirement about droppings is that they must be picked up and disposed of at least twice each week, there may not be fly-breeding or unsanitary conditions, and there may not be a noxious odor associated with the chicken coop.⁷

Urban chickens provide tasteful and fresh eggs that are easy to access, promote sustainability and local food, provide manure for compost, and make those who participate happier. With the right policies in place and consideration for neighbors and community, raising chickens can be a positive successful experience for all. To see what raising chickens in a positive, safe, sustainable home can look like participate on the Tour de Coops THIS Saturday, visit www.tourdecoops.org for additional information.

⁷ <http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=12036>, <http://www.gilbertaz.gov/code/faqmunicode.cfm>