



Penn State **Extension**

Small-Scale Poultry Production

A FACT SHEET SERIES AVAILABLE AT EXTENSION.PSU.EDU/ANIMALS/POULTRY

Raising Fowl in Urban Areas

Over the past few years, raising domestic poultry such as pigeons, ornamental poultry, and small meat and egg flocks has become an increasingly popular pastime for urban residents.

Most of us can appreciate the pleasures and benefits of raising birds. It is a relaxing activity that offers an insight into other forms of life and basic life processes. People enjoy the companionship of their birds and the social interaction that comes from club activities and competitions.

However, before you purchase any birds, you must check with your local government and property associations to make sure you can raise poultry in your area. Many localities restrict the raising of poultry. Recently, however, many cities, towns, and subdivisions throughout the nation have reexamined local laws, ordinances, and property owners' guidelines to allow residences to raise small numbers of poultry in urban areas.

The urban animal hobbyist must try not to infringe on the neighbor who may be sensitive to noise, odor, flies, rodents, and unsightliness due to inadequately designed and maintained facilities. People differ in their tolerance to the same conditions. Just because you let your chickens run free for a year doesn't mean the new neighbor will enjoy them in their yard or garden.

The following are some guidelines for owners of poultry in urban areas. Remember to follow all local laws and ordinances. By following the guidelines, you can avoid a good deal of conflict with others in your community and the development of ordinances banning the raising of certain animals in your community.

Health and Safety

The important factors to consider are the location of animal enclosures in relation to residences, storage of feed to avoid rodent problems, fly control, sanitation, and disposal of animal waste in a safe manner. The health and well-being of the animals should also be taken into account. The animals must be given adequate space, proper nutrition, sufficient attention, and a place to seclude themselves. The enclosure should also provide protection from the environment and predators.



Confinement. Never allow animals or birds to roam free. Provide the following amount of space of confinement for your birds (fenced outdoor access is optional):

- Provide a minimum of 1 square foot per pound of body weight for permanent indoor confinement areas.
- Provide 3 cubic feet of air (total enclosed space) per pound of body weight for permanent indoor confinement quarters.
- Provide a minimum of 2 square feet per pound of body weight for permanent outdoor fenced areas.

Setbacks for Housing. Do not place outdoor enclosures within 25–50 feet of a residence or dwelling or place any permanent detached structures too close to the residence of another property owner.

- For urban settings, keep structures 25 feet from property lines.
- For rural settings, keep structures 100 feet from property lines.

Waste. Clean litter and animal waste on a regular basis and dispose of it promptly and properly. Pens with a 3-inch-deep bed of pine shavings should be cleaned at least once every 6 weeks or when the litter gets wet or starts to develop an odor. Poultry waste with pine shaving bedding makes a great amendment for composting. Some localities

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require that waste be double bagged and disposed of with household waste. Poultry waste must be composted before adding to soil. Waste from home slaughter of poultry for meat consumption is not allowed in most localities. If it is allowed, follow local and state laws as to the proper disposal of waste (feathers, internal organs, and other parts you do not wish to consume) produced from slaughter.

Predators and Rodents in the Neighborhood. To avoid attracting rodents and other predators to the neighborhood, store feed in rodent-proof containers. When building or preparing the coop and outdoor pens to raise poultry, do the following:

- Cover outdoor pens.
- Make sure you have a way to lock the birds inside safely at night.
- Bury the sides of outdoor pens so animals cannot dig under and get to your birds.
- Prevent animals from digging under any permanent structures.
- Use small mesh wire to keep wild birds and rodents from accessing your pens.

Public Nuisance

Appearance and Property Values. The appearance of all types of equipment and housing, particularly external runs that are visible to neighbors, should not detract from the overall appearance of the surroundings. Exteriors of sheds and other structures should be kept painted and well maintained. Most localities require that structures be built to conform to local architecture or building materials being used in the community. Weeds and trash should be removed from around the facilities. Provide a sight fence or shrub screening to a minimum height of 4 feet around any outdoor enclosure.

Keep all structures or fences well maintained. Old, poorly maintained structures surrounded by weeds and piles of trash are not acceptable and detract from the appearance of the neighborhood. If your activity is seen as an eyesore, neighbors will quickly find other aspects of your poultry flock a nuisance as well.

Noise and Odors. All animals and birds have characteristic noises and odors. Owners are obliged to house animals so the odors are not offensive and noises are no louder than the normal speaking voice of an adult human. Owners can do this by insulating quarters, providing adequate ventilation, and using good sanitation practices.

The crow of male chickens tends to bring the greatest objection from neighbors. Most localities only allow you to raise four to six female chickens and no males at anytime.

Proper landscaping walls and vegetative barriers can provide screening and also help muffle sounds. These barriers also keep your activities out of full view, which often leads to fewer questions and complaints.

Odor should not be an issue if pens are large enough for the birds, are cleaned regularly, and kept dry. Waterfowl, due to the wet nature of their environment, are hard to keep on a small urban lot due to odors. However, it can be done with proper planning.

A few other guidelines that local ordinances may require in order to raise chickens in your area include a minimum lot size to be allowed to raise poultry, a minimum or maximum coop or pen size, and an application for a permit to raise poultry on your property, which may also require an annual fee and inspection by a predetermined party.

Once you do have poultry, remember that you are responsible for providing “good management practices” for your flock. Good management practices are the minimum care that is required to humanely maintain the birds. Caring for the birds and tending to their basic needs is a constant responsibility—24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- Birds need to be sheltered from the environment and predators.
- Birds need a constant supply of fresh water.
- Birds need to be fed a balanced diet appropriate for their age and state of production—starter diets for 0–6 weeks, grower diets for 6–18 weeks, and layer diets for birds over 18 weeks of age that are in egg production.
- Birds should have a 3-inch base of dry litter such as pine shavings in their pen, and it should be cleaned every 6 weeks. If the birds are raised in wire floored pens, the waste pans should be cleaned daily to prevent odors and flies.
- Eggs should be collected daily.
- As an owner, you should monitor bird health and seek help if anything appears questionable.

If you are just becoming interested in raising poultry on your property or have been for years, remember that diplomacy and cooperation can help avoid conflicts. If you are raising birds in an urban environment, follow some of the suggestions provided in this fact sheet so you can prevent yourself and others raising animals in your community from unnecessary conflict and ordinances.

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