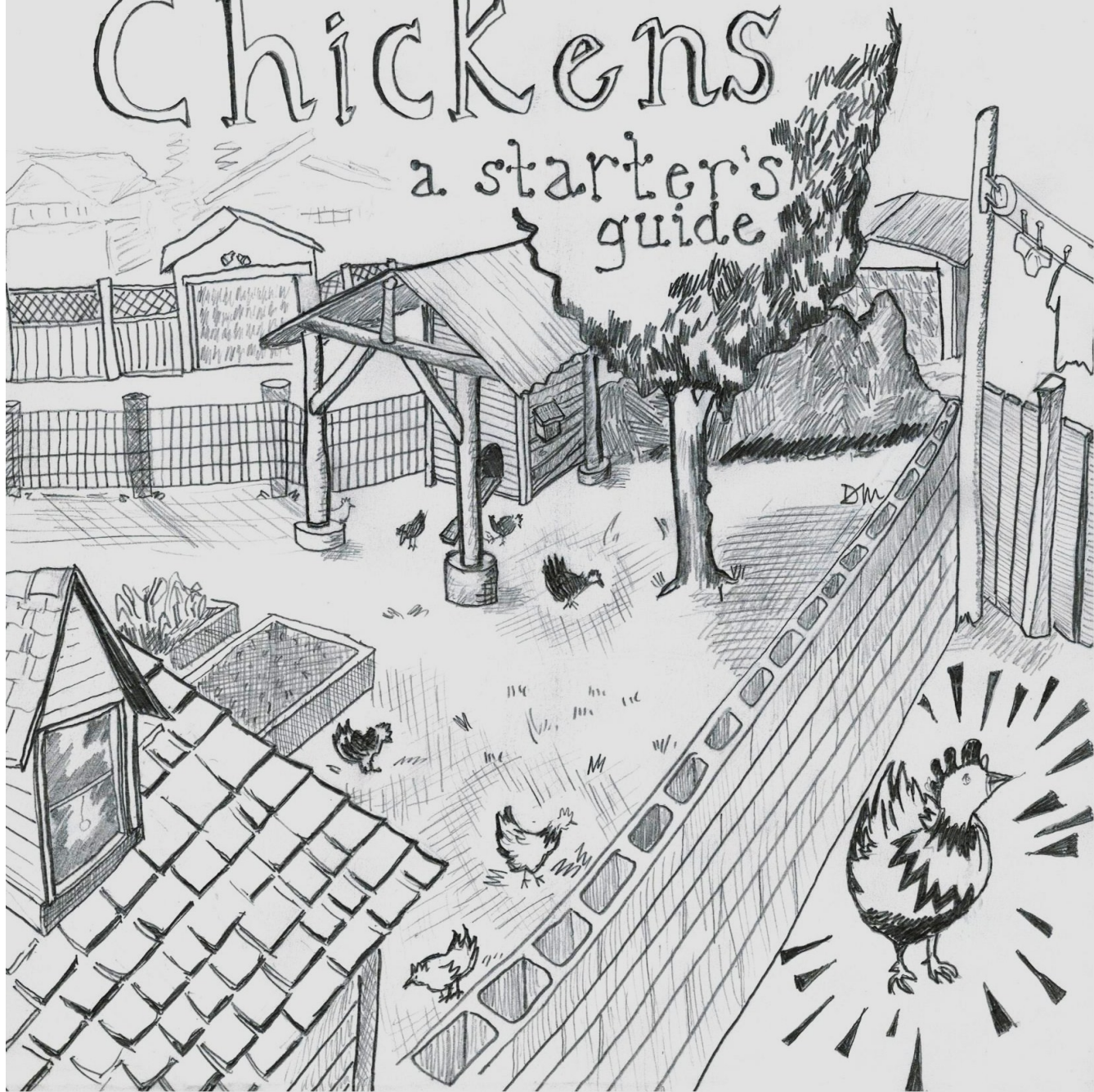


# BAC KYARD Chickens

a starter's  
guide



# Urban Chicken Guide (Metro Vancouver Edition)

Duncan Martin from

www.DailyEggs.com – Locally made chicken coops 604-329-3863

## The Vancouver Chicken Bylaw:

- Each house may keep up to 4 hens (no roosters) for egg-laying purposes.
- No chicks – chicks can turn out to be roosters, so get 4-6 month-old hens (called pullets)
- The city asks that people fill in a free online registry for backyard chickens.
- Chickens must have full protection from pests and predators.
- Each hen must have 4 square feet of coop space and 10 square feet of “run.” There must also be roosting space for hens to sleep
- Chicken enclosures must be at least 3 feet from the property line and 10 feet from windows and doors.
- Slaughtering chickens in Vancouver is not allowed

**Other Municipalities:** (see <http://urbanchickens.pbworks.com/North-American-Chicken-Laws> to search for your city)

OR just go on your city's bylaw page and read their animal control bylaw

**Burnaby** – There is nothing in the animal control bylaw prohibiting chickens, however there is vague language in the zoning bylaw that keeps them from most areas of the city

**North Vancouver District** – Yes!

**North Vancouver Township** – In Process!

**New Westminster** – Yes!

**West Vancouver** – No

**Richmond** – Not unless you have ½ acre or more

**Surrey** – Not unless you have an acre or more

**Port Coquitlam** – Yes– Not allowed to be “at large”

**Delta** – Only on “large residential lots”

**Maple Ridge** – Not in residentially-zoned areas



## What do chickens eat?

**Chicken feed** – This is often in the form of nutrient-balanced mash or mash pellets. This is \$10-20 per 20 kg bag depending on whether you get conventional or organic.

Laying hens typically eat mash pellets with 16% protein. This is the most common and productive formula. If you have chicks, make sure to get chick feed, which is lower in calcium. Feed should always stay dry or it will get moldy.

Chickens self-regulate how much they eat, so keep a constant supply of feed and they will decide when they've had enough.



**Water** – Keep it clean and always available. I recommend 2 tablespoons of unpasteurized apple cider vinegar per gallon of water to ward off parasites and to help with digestion.

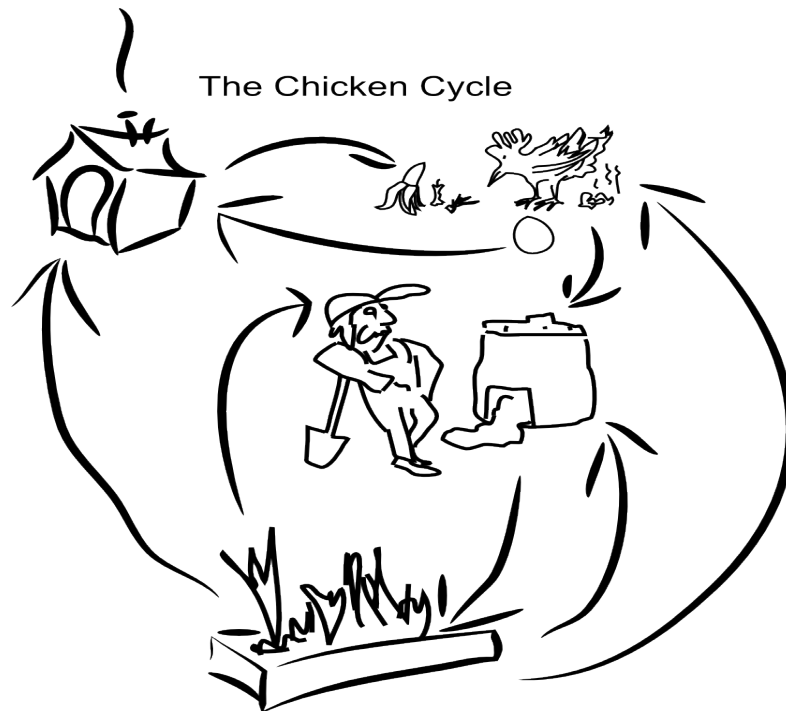
**Chicken scratch** – This is another name for whole grains and legumes that have been dried and cracked. Chickens love to peck at scratch if you scatter a handful of it. It's not necessary, but your chickens will appreciate it and it's a good way to summon them.

**Table scraps** – Chickens will typically pick and choose what they want to eat, and they leave the rest. Don't worry too much about what is and isn't good to feed them. You'll figure it out pretty quickly. Just avoid raw meat and be careful of teabags with staples in them. The internet has plenty of extensive DOs and DONTs lists if you want to be really careful.

**Weeds, slugs, bugs** – Anything you pull out of the garden can go right into the coop. Again, the chickens will decide what they like. The rest will become bedding or just rot away.

**Oyster shell, crushed eggshell** – These provide added calcium and are rarely needed if you are providing fortified feed, but if your eggs' shells are looking weak, it can't hurt to give the hens a supplement. If you use eggshells, let them dry out or bake them and then crush them.

**Grit** – Hens have a gizzard instead of teeth. As they eat small stones, chickens collect them in the gizzard, which grinds their food. After a while the stones wear down and pass through. As long as there is some coarse gravel around, chickens will get enough grit. This is available for cheap, however, at many feed stores.



## FAQ:

### *Will hens lay eggs without a rooster?*

Like many animals, female chickens produce eggs whether or not a male fertilizes them.

### *How often do chickens lay eggs?*

A healthy productive hen will lay about 5-6 eggs per week. This is sometimes interrupted by various natural pauses such as broodiness (a hormonal mothering instinct that can set in for a few weeks), molting (renewing feathers), or just being under the weather. Winter production is bolstered by having a light in order to extend the daylight. Some breeds lay a few more eggs than others, so don't hold them to any expectations.

### *How long do hens lay?*

Hens will lay eggs from about 6 months to 4 years of age. This is approximate and can vary from bird to bird. As they get older, hens will produce fewer – but larger – eggs.

### *Where can I buy laying hens?*

Believe it or not, a search on Craigslist brings up many chickens for sale by farmers in the Fraser Valley. And a fun weekend outing is Fraser Valley Auctions (all kinds of farm animals) at 21801-56th Ave. Langley, BC V2Y 2M9. Or see the next section for farms in the Fraser Valley. Do some research on the breed, their laying capacity, weather hardiness, temperament, etc. McMurray Hatchery's website has a fairly comprehensive online guide to chickens that is worth a look.

### ***What do I do if I have to go away for a few days?***

It is important to make sure your hens have food and clean water, and you'll generally want to collect eggs daily. This makes for a perfect neighborly agreement. They tend the hens and get fresh eggs. If you are away for a long period, you can disassemble the coop (the Vancooper only requires 30 minutes of assembly) and move it to a friend's backyard.

I sometimes leave my hens for 3 days with food and water and they're perfectly happy.

### ***What if my chicken gets sick?***

This is a question all pet owners must deal with from time to time. There are vets, such as the Night Owl Animal Hospital, that can treat chickens. This will almost always be more expensive than replacing them, but sometimes medication can be necessary in the case of spreadable disease. Many afflictions can be diagnosed and treated with a little research. Books such as *The Chicken Health Handbook* are helpful, as well as this poop-diagnosis site: <http://chat.allotment.org.uk/index.php?topic=17568.0>.

Sometimes it's as simple as giving your flock a poultry de-wormer available at feed stores. Sometimes culling a bird is necessary, however (see below)

### ***End of Life***

If you decide it's time to end your chicken's life, consider that the bylaw prohibits backyard slaughter. Perhaps you have a cousin outside of the city who can host this. Alternatively, you can have your hen put down by the vet, but it will not be edible (and it costs about \$40). Don't name your hens if you think you might slaughter them eventually. This makes it much harder. Slaughter is done by snapping the chicken's neck (easiest method for humane slaughter) or very quickly cutting off its head with a sharp knife. The chicken will have muscle spasms for a minute or so, but it will be completely dead at this point.

### ***What are some good chicken resources?***

1. Village Vancouver ([Villagevancouver.ca](http://Villagevancouver.ca)) is a networking site for the sustainability community in metro Vancouver. They have a special message board called "chicken coop co-ops" that you can join to post and see postings from local members on chickens for sale, feed store runs, advice, etc.
2. Books: *The Chicken Health Handbook* and *City Chicks* are two good books, among many, for new and experienced chicken keepers alike
3. [Backyardchickens.com](http://Backyardchickens.com) is a wealth of chicken knowledge. It has "official" info and participatory forums. Just make sure that the advice given by others is relevant to your environment.

## **Feed , Chickens, and Supply Stores :**

### **The Homesteader's Emporium.**

649 E. Hastings St. at Heatley St. in Vancouver. Rick is a great local source for all things chicken (including my coops!) [www.homesteadersemporium.ca](http://www.homesteadersemporium.ca)

### **Marks Pet Stop :**

2<sup>nd</sup> and Commercial Drive. Vancouver, BC V5N 4A6, 604 255-4844. Mark sells orders mash from otter Co-op, so call first to make sure he's stocked.

## Roddick Feed & Farm Supply

4119 – 40th Street Delta, BC V4K 3N2 Tel: 604-946-2771

### Steve and Pascale.

These two Maple Ridge farmers often have high-quality chicks and fully-grown chickens for sale at good prices. 604-462-4146

### Grade Eh Farms

Small Delta farm specializing in rare and heritage breeds for hobby and farms. Focusing on pampered, pastured, poultry preservation. Prices for chicks, chickens, and eggs available by request.

[Gradeehfarms.ca](http://Gradeehfarms.ca)

### Otter Coop (call to see if they carry organic)

3600 248 Street, Aldergrove-(604) 856-7011

16780 104 Avenue, Surrey-(604) 582-2517

12343 Harris Road. Pitt Meadows. 604- 465-5651

6420 Ladner Trunk Rd, Ladner-(604) 940-1322

Tisol – They're everywhere, but call ahead – their chicken feed stock is hit or miss.

## Building a coop:

1. Follow the bylaw whenever possible. The city has visited people's coops, so it doesn't hurt to be compliant.
2. Consider your schedule and likely pattern of maintenance. Can the kids reach it if they need to clean it? Will you be letting them out in the morning and in in the evening, or giving them full reign over the whole pen and house at all times? Where will you store your feed? Is there a compost nearby?
3. Use a material and a design that considers Metro Vancouver's wet weather. Large roof overhangs, cedar wood, protective stain....
4. Use 1/2" hardware cloth, **not chicken wire**, on all outdoor enclosures. Chicken wire is weak and has rat-sized openings. It is only good for keeping *chickens in*. Bury some hardware cloth into the ground to prevent burrowing pests and predators – Or build a coop that sits atop a raised garden bed. Make two beds and move it back and forth year-to year. The wood on the garden bed offers good ground protection.
5. Make it **easy to clean**. This means access and materials. Bedding (hay, straw etc.) on linoleum makes for quick cleaning. The chickens **must have a perch** – something simulating a tree branch that they can all stand on to sleep. You will find concentrated poop underneath. Consider a removable board or strips of cardboard that you can periodically just throw in the

compost.

6. At least four chickens can share one nest box. This just needs to be about 12"x12"x12" and slightly shut off from the rest of the coop. It should be off the ground and somewhat dark if possible.
7. Raccoons are smart; don't underestimate their dexterity – make sure that your doors have latches or locks that a raccoon can't open. **Rats will eat chicken feed if they can reach it.** Clean up any spills when filling a feeder and keep your feed in a rat-proof container like a metal trash can.
8. Ventilation – make vents in the coop that allow air flow without uncomfortable cross-drafts. Humidity is worse than cold, so don't seal them in the coop just because it's -10 outside. If you use hot water to heat the coop on an especially cold night, make sure it's in a closed container.
9. Light – Chickens lay best with about 14-16 hours of light per day, so buy a cheap light timer and stick a bulb or Christmas lights in the coop for the winter months. This also provides some heat, although metro Vancouver rarely gets cold enough to have to worry about frozen chickens.
10. Food and water should be outside the coop. If temperatures fall, make sure chickens still have liquid water or an ample supply of snow to eat.
11. A dust bath is helpful for dealing with mites. Chickens enjoy a sandy area (you may include some diatomaceous earth) where they can roll around. The small particles slice the skeletons of the various mites.
12. Bedding – There are various options for bedding and ground cover.  
In the coop: straw, hay, cardboard, pond liner, wood shavings (not cedar), even newspaper  
In the run: straw (cut short if possible), gravel, sand, hay, *dry* grass clippings  
Carbon-based materials turn into great compost  
Hay has grains, which chickens love, but can also cause weeds in the compost and gets moldy if not stored dry.