

How many Chickens?

So you're thinking of keeping chickens? How many hens do you need?

Should I say how many eggs do you need? Apparently the average consumption of eggs is around 290 eggs per year per person.

This would suggest that a family of five would be buying over 2 dozen eggs per week. This figure will seem very high to many but remember it would also include all the eggs that go into the food industry. Have a think about how many eggs you buy at present. Also consider, if you had eggs would you use them more. Do you bake at present or do you intend baking more. Have a look at the egg recipes for ideas for using eggs more.

The egg laying cycle

The average chicken will lay around 240 eggs per year. However, there are large variations between the different breeds (see articles on breeds and hybrid birds); there is also a seasonal and age variation. During the summer months for an average young bird, she will require between 24-26 hours to produce one egg. After 30 minutes rest she will start the process all over again. Once every 3-5 days she will take the day off. Some hybrid breeds (see articles on breeds and hybrid birds), will only rest once every ten days. During the winter months the average bird will slow down production. This is to do with daylight length, which can be artificially adjusted, and the age of the bird. Generally, as the bird gets older its production decreases, although this is also affected by breed.

Chickens enjoy a crowd

Whichever breed you decide on I would suggest at least a trio. Chickens are social animals, they need a hierarchy, they need a pecking order. One on its own will not thrive, twos company but chickens enjoy a crowd. To produce eggs the flock does not need a cockerel. Obviously if you were intending to incubate some eggs they would need a cockerel to fertilise them. This can be fun but spare a thought for neighbours; a cockerel can be very noisy.

If you are not sure how many birds to get you can always start with three and add some more later. Adding new birds to an existing flock will create some squabbling, as the new pecking order is worked out, but this will generally sort itself out within a few days. Expect the egg production to go down for a few days after introducing new birds. I will often introduce birds at night and leave them shut in during the following day.

What if you get too many eggs?

If you do have more eggs than you can cope with, they always make a welcome gift to neighbours, especially if you'll be asking them to look after your chickens when you're away. Consider also how you can use more eggs yourself. Flans and quiches are a great way to use up eggs and make good picnic food.

Summary

1.
Work out the number of eggs you will use
2.
Don't buy less than three hens
3.
You don't need a cockerel
4.
You can add more birds later
5.
Give away surplus, use more eggs

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