

Keeping Chickens Newsletter

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www.KeepingChickensNewsletter.com



February 2012
Vol.1

Hi

Welcome to my Keeping Chickens Newsletter.

Thanks to everyone who has sent in their keeping chickens tips, stories and photos etc. - as usual, if you have anything chicken related (tips, photos, stories, questions, coops etc.) you'd like to share in future issues of the newsletter or blog posts then just email news@self-sufficient-life.com and I will do my best to answer / include them.

Best Wishes

Gina

Subscriber Letters

Lisa : A while back, someone mentioned having a few chicks with curled toes. We had this problem with one of our chicks a few years ago, and I took her in to the vet (I know, don't even say it!). He taped each of her toes to a piece of x-ray film (probably because it was lightweight, but somewhat firm). He said to leave it on for a week and sure enough, when we removed it, she was walking fine. It might be worth a try at home. Lisa Adair, Ojai CA

Kathleen : Dear Gina and Readers! I really love this newsletter – Thank you Gina and all the contributors! We are new to chicken husbandry. Our six girls are about 5 months old, not yet laying, but seem healthy and happy. We are interested in using their manure as compost or dispose of it in the most earth friendly way. We use pine and or cedar shavings as bedding. I would appreciate hearing about how other suburban chicken families handle their chicken droppings. Thank you very much for your awesome newsletter, Kathleen

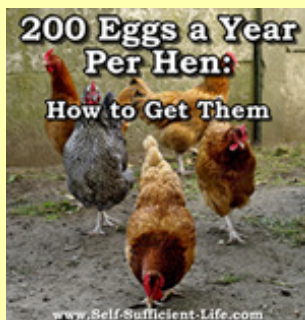
Cindy : We have electricity in our coop but it seems like the hens prefer the water from the plastic waterer VS the metal one with the heater. We keep the plastic waterers up just above the highest roosts in our coop on little shelves (about 2 feet from the ceiling). This morning it was 6 degrees F. and the only waterer with ice was the one near the front door—just a bit of water starting to crystallize. I added warm water to that one. We also have a heat light on near the back of the coop when it gets that cold—and is supposed to stay this way for the better part of the next week or so. Between the body heat and the heat light the water in the back only freezes when it gets down below zero for days at a time. The hens have never knocked anything down yet either. Cindy-Northern Wisconsin

Dan : I have been reading the latest from Missouri and Georgia and am surprised it gets cold enough for the water to freeze there. Here we are cold for 6 months and need insulated chicken houses with enough chickens to keep them from freezing. They also need to stay inside at all times for that 6 months. Dan from Alberta, Canada.

Ann : Hi Gina, thank you for January news letter, I would just like to share a useful tip. Just before the autumn Of 2011 I put my 7 girls into a new shed for a permanent home as they had been in a couple of small houses and thought they could be updated into a new residence. Thinking about cleaning a bigger area every week I was in my local Aldi and notice large plastic snow shovels and thought they would make a fantastic cleaning shovel so purchased one, well its the best £8.99 I have spent for cleaning purposes. It makes cleaning the floor of the chicken shed so much easier and quicker and not so much bending. Hope you can share this tip with others. Thanks again Regards Ann (Worcestershire)



Donna : Just had to tell you about our addition to our chicken family. Last summer this feral very young kitten suddenly appeared in our coop.....she was instantly adopted by one of the hens and seemed perfectly happy with her new Mom. She remained with our flock and has now become much more friendly.....does not want to be picked up but steps right up to be fed & have her belly rubbed whenever we are feeding the girls. We did manage to capture her long enough to take her to the vet & have her shots updated.....so we hope to have her with us for a long time yet. We've named the pair "Henny Penny & Kitten Little". Donna Lennox Lebanon Ct 06249 USA



200 Eggs a Year

Chicken Care Guide

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS](http://www.Self-Sufficient-Life.com)



Picture of our coop before we put on the top.

Penny : Hi Gina, I thought I would share a few pictures of our chickens and coop. We have mostly Rhode Island Reds and Plymouths. Also have 2 bantam hens. Total of 31 hens and 1 rooster.



We received 26 hens Nov. 3, 2011. Two didn't make it in transit. One of the "freebie" hens is called a "rare exotic chick" which is pictured. Pretty markings with black tufts on each side of the face. Sure wish I knew what it's really called. Haven't a clue.



Picture of our coop after top put on. Tried to make it as critter proof as possible. I really enjoy your newsletter. Thank you. Penny



How To Make A Hen Saddle

Simple Sewing Project

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Jill : I have no idea which hen is responsible for these whopper eggs probably the one walking funny !! The coop is heated and extra lighting is provided, so we have full production. The girls are quite vocal all day, love getting their treats and have adapted to being inside for these really cold days. Friday morning we had -26, but the coop was at 45, above zero !! Happy chickens make big eggs !! *Jill*



Graham : We're from the 'land down under' - in rural NSW, Australia where it's hot right now. Attached some recent photos of our new chicken house, with four 1 year-old Isa Brown hens. We rescued them from a large battery egg farm 3 months ago. The chicken house is now located in a safe chook-run of about 100 square metres.



I'm considering a rooster, and that's what has prompted me to write. Let me explain why.

The hens have settled in well, and have mostly grown new feathers (they had bare skin around their necks and chests from feeding through their wire cages). But there's some serious bullying going on. It got so bad that the lowest-ranked hen began to sleep separately in a small cupboard in the chicken-run. When I

discovered this, I decided to remove her in the mornings so that she gets some peck-free time. She has become a bit of a pet, lays her egg each morning in my woodwork workshop where there are plenty of wood-shavings to nest in and generally enjoys wandering around the houseyard, but often in sight of the others who are in the chook-run. I let them all free-range together late in the morning when all their eggs are laid. During those free-range times, there's still bullying, but it doesn't seem to be as intense as it is around feeding time in the chook-run, when I take them their mash in the evenings, or first thing in the mornings when I go to check on them.

But perhaps this arrangement isn't ideal, and so I'm considering a rooster to help create order for the four hens. I've been given mixed advice - some say that a rooster is too much trouble, and others say that a rooster will not tolerate bullying amongst his hens once he's gained control of the group. There's consensus that they're protective, and that could be a bonus as the hens love to free range over our 6 acres in our village which has a few dogs and the occasional wedge-tailed eagle. What do you think? Rooster or no rooster? All the best. Graham



My Reply : A rooster can add a lot of colour and interest to a flock. Some roosters are an absolute delight and will take care of their girls, protect the flock, keep order and make sure they all eat and get into the coop safely at night etc. etc. on the other hand there are some roosters that are too rough and injure their 'favourites', attack people, and will crow all day long. It is very much a case of pot luck (perhaps 'pot' being the operative word if your rooster proves himself to be more of a nuisance than a help). A rooster could work out wonderfully and they can be a real boost to a flock when they do, but they are all individuals so it really is impossible to know what the effect will be on your flock without trying.

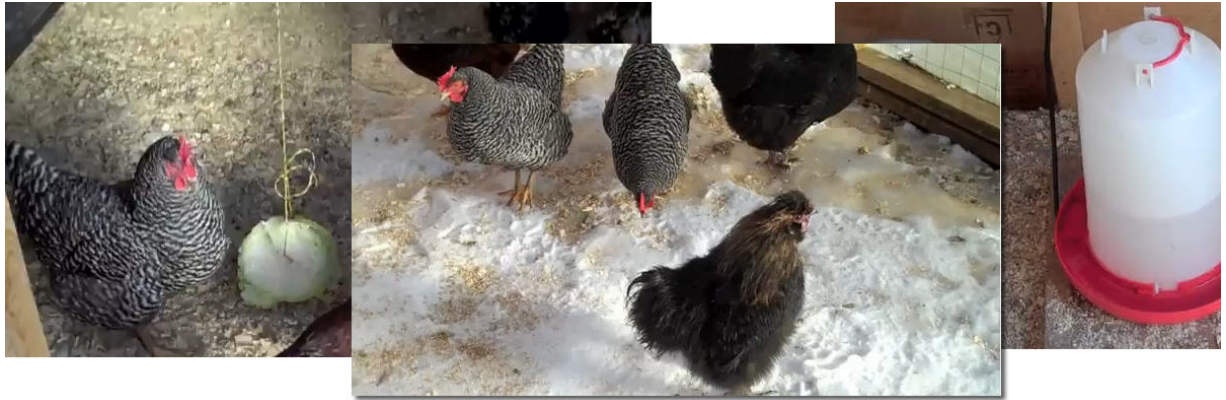


H. Burnip : I enjoy and appreciate very much your newsletter. I am sending you pictures of one of my chickens egg that I found yesterday. I do not know who is laying it.

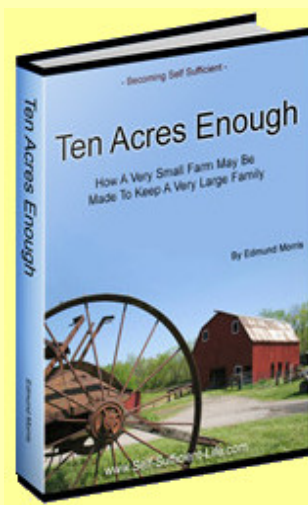


I have 11 chickens: 6 unknowing breed, 2 buff orpingtons and 7 month old (3) aracaunas . I love them and treat them as my pets. Happy new year for you and all the subscribers. Sincerely, H.Burnip





Dale Calder : Hi Gina: Just finished reading the latest issue of the Newsletter and enjoyed it very much as usual. I thought the readers might like to see what chicken keeping is like here in the frozen north. I'm located on the east coast of Canada and of course we are in the middle of our winter, which as winters go hasn't been too bad, at least not yet. We haven't had very much snow just a couple of inches on the ground at this point, but we are in a cold snap as I write. Night before last the temperature was down to minus 17C, last night it was minus 15C and it is 10PM now and so far the temperature is down to minus 5C so at least the trend is going in the right direction. One of the problems that we have with hens closed up for extended periods of time during the cold weather is boredom and if bored they can start to pick at each other or pick at their eggs. I see a lot of people talking about the methods they use to keep water from freezing this time of year. [This link will take you to a video that I made that shows how I attempt to solve these problems.](#)



Ten Acres Enough

How A Very Small Farm May Be Made To
Keep A Very Large Family

Ten Acres Enough is a self-sufficiency classic written by Edmund Morris, and is his personal story of his journey from city businessman to farmer. In this book Edmund details the first 3 years of his 'back to the land' experience and explains honestly what worked for him and what did not.

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Jan : Hi Gina, love your newsletter, lots of good information and pictures there. It's been really cold here in Northeastern Massachusetts and as we have no electricity out to the chicken coop I've had to change out frozen water with fresh water several times a day. I'm really concerned about running an extension cord out to the coop so for now this will have to do. I've been putting Vaseline on the rooster's combs but they do have small spots of frostbite on them. Poor things! I've attached a couple of photo's of my little group.



The next picture is their first real snow - all of ¼" but hardly any of them would venture out in it - they actually flew from their little door up to the roost and stayed there about an hour!



Dealing with my first broody hen now, I'd love to let her hatch some but it's too cold right now! Maybe in the spring... Jan in Topsfield

Dan : I have been reading the readers concerns with chickens eating eggs. Years ago I found an article on this in a poultry book and have used it since that time. It works great. Build a box 30 inches high at the back and sloping down to 15 inches high in front. Make it 24 inches deep and 4 feet wide. Make the front or lowest half of the top into a door that swings up for working in and picking up the eggs. Half way across the front cut a hole 14 inches square. Put a landing in front of it for the chickens to jump onto before going inside. Put lots of straw inside. It is mostly dark inside and the hens will go in to lay and never bother the eggs. Please put this in for those concerned with egg eating. Dan.



Step by Step chicken coop plans for four different coop designs and sizes - including this midsize chicken coop for up to 4 chickens.

Build Your Own Chicken Coop
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Eugene : I have had the problem with freezing water in the past , as my chickens are on an allotment electricity is not an option . So I have been using a Paraffin green house defrost heater surrounded with bricks and checker plate on top of the bricks . The just place a pan with water on top . Once you get the height right it runs for weeks on a few £ and on one know its there.

Do any of your readers have tips for securing Electric fence energisers and how to keep them going in the snow?

Peggy : I thought I would respond to Cheska's letter on the problem with rats. We have had chickens for many many years so over time we have had the odd problem with rats. The one thing we found that worked was, a trap, a two foot piece of stove pipe or anything similar and celery leaves, yup they seem to love celery leaves. First put some celery leaves in one end of the stove pipe and put that end against something so it is well blocked, next place trap at other end and make sure it is secure so the rat doesn't run off with it. You may need to sprinkle a little bait around to get them to the trap. Now its up to the rat. It has always worked for us hope it works for you.

Elaine : I don't know if this is information anyone can use, but here it comes ... I have two wonderful Black Australorps. I was told they are sisters, raised by the hen who mothered them, and they act like sisters, very interested and concerned about each other. I have room for another chicken, maybe two. But I think it would be a mistake to add more birds, and disrupt their peace and happiness. I live in a tiny house with two dogs and two cats. I would love to take in more animals, but I know that every living being needs a certain amount of room to be content. Crowding them makes trouble for everyone. I don't know the dimensions for contentment, but I have a sense of what works, and I think if we pay attention, all of us can make this kind of judgment.

I loved the comments by the lady who saved her sick chicken. I feel the same way. These are pets that give me breakfast, and when they don't lay anymore, they'll have the same degree of attention and love they get now. I'll just get my eggs at the farmer's market. If, and probably when, one of them dies, I may try to introduce two or three more birds. But three is an iffy number in relationships, so I'll just have to play it as it lays (so to speak).

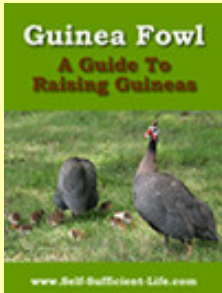
Matthew : A lot of the readers have the issue of their chickens getting too cold in the winter. Where I live in South Australia the Summers are very hot. Sometimes it even gets up to 46 degrees Celsius (114 degrees Fahrenheit) and the chickens really don't like it. Do you have any suggestions on how to keep the chickens cool? I have a wooden chicken Coop which keeps them significantly cooler but they still get hot during the daytime. Any ideas would be greatly appreciated.

Shannon : Hi, Gina and the rest of the news letter! First time sending anything in but I read the story from our MA chicken keeper with the rat problem and thought I'd offer a couple of suggestions for natural rat repellent. It's not surprising that they haven't fallen victim to the traps. Rats are less ambiguously curious which is often what trips mice up. One thing that I've heard works with rodents is mint. Though I'm not sure how effective it is on rats in specific, a lot of critters find its strong smell and oils irritating. You could try planting some along your retaining wall, but I would personally recommend keeping them in pots as mint likes to grow and spread. A lot. But you get some nice home grown mint as a bonus!

Since you already said you have a dog but are still having a problem with the rats, I'm guessing he's not much of a mouser! It might still be a good idea to pick up the poison and traps and have him do his business in and around the areas where the rats nest. The smell might put them off enough to pick up and move house. If that doesn't work and you're open to adopting another pet who will serve a dual purpose as rat control, a good dog breed to consider is nearly any type of terrier. It's what they were bred for and these tenacious little guys will go so far as to dig up the burrow the rats are living in! Be warned though, that terriers also tend to be very smart and high energy, a combo in a breed that should only be attempted by a more experienced dog owner who has time and energy in spades to deal with training and supervision.

If a cat is more your thing, nice mixed breed alley cats tend to have better instincts for mousing. Adopting one from an animal shelter is always a great option since they're often over full with them and the staff who've taken care of the animals will be able to guide you to the right one. From personal experience and accounts from freinds, females tend to take to hunting more than males but that more a generalization than a rule of thumb.

Grea : I have a thought for Cheska with the rat problem, I have had great success keeping rodents a bay by having a few ducks around. There is nothing quite as ferocious as a duck hen who has just spotted her lunch! They swallow them whole and the entire flock gets in on the chase.



Guinea Fowl
A Guide To Raising Guineaes

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS](#)

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Deborah : We too had a horrible invasion of rats right after our first lovely hens arrived. We are not sure if the rodents had always been living in the untended upper quarter acre or not, but the chickens and the intensive gardening really brought them to our attention. Here in Fair Oaks CA, we found it was the water that was the big draw. We moved the water to the rat proof night enclosure. We continued re-filling the bait stations, but were terrified a dying rat would wander into the area used by our English Setters. The setters would gobble it down and we were afraid of poisoning them. We discovered a very effective do-it-yourself rodenticide - peanut butter bon-bons! Mix equal parts creamy peanut butter and plaster of paris. (Keep out of reach of chickens, dogs and children!). We put it down holes and in the bait stations. It works! Deborah Bean

Naomi : Please tell Cheska that I have learned this: There is something called Balsam Fir Oil, which I order from a place in Maine. I had many little mice running into the coop at night. I sprinkled drops of this oil across the entrances to the coop and I've had no mice since. Apparently they hate it. It smells great. It's fairly expensive, but a little goes a long way. We also have lots of roof rats around here, and I've never really had a problem with them.

Now if someone could please tell me how to repel squirrels from the bird feeders, I'd be very grateful!!!



Cliff : In reply to your question on how to get rid of rats I have found two ways that work very well. Borrow a Jack Russell or two as they just love rats or sit very still with a air gun and wait for them to come out. The rats will take some time to get used to new bait like your peanut butter but if you keep putting it down they will start to take it. If I lived closer I would come and help as I have Three Jacks who love a spot of ratting. Cliff in Kent England.

Glennis : In answer to Cheska, who had a rat problem in the January II issue ...Rats are incredibly intelligent. I'm sorry you have so many to battle, this may not work as well for you. Set out the snap traps with bait...really good bait...leftover dinner scraps are best. Spoil the little suckers...your turn is coming! When you're finding your traps cleaned out in the morning, remember...they aren't set, just baited, it's time to switch to baiting AND setting the traps. Use some good fishing line, not too lightweight, but still light enough to tie, tie the bait to the traps before you try to set them. Trust me when I say this is a really great time to have fried chicken because they love it as much as we do. Tie the bones to the traps. This way, they can't steal the bait. And they've gotten used to eating at the traps, so they don't anticipate them being set... After the evil deed is done, scrub the traps VERY well and boil in water for a few minutes if possible. Otherwise, rinsing with boiling water usually works well enough. It's a slow process, but it is effective! And to you Gina... Thank you immensely for the fabulous newsletter! It's one "in-box" item that never gets deleted! Best wishes, Glennis Roseberry. No. California

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