

What the Cluck?!
An Alternative View on Raising Chickens
by
Andrew and Jennifer Ayers

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Foreward:

All of my life I have wanted to be a writer. For me, its not even about getting paid for it, I just take joy in other people reading things that I have written and learning from them. I hope to be able to live that dream on a larger scale with this book and hopefully many others. The simple act of writing daily at The Tribal Future has made me a happier person.

Like every other author in history, I have some people to thank.

My wife Jenn, who has been my light and my life for 10 years now. Without her, I wouldn't be anyone close to the person I am now.

To my parents, who both instilled in me a love of reading that led me to want to write.

To Ms. Anna Hess of The Walden Effect. Your book Microbusiness Independence was a huge factor in me writing this. Also, your kind words via email encouraged me to start writing.

Lastly, to Lance Hammond. You will never read these words, but I owe you a thanks anyway. If I hadn't worked for you, I would have stayed complacent in my suburban retail hell much longer than I did. Thank you for driving me out beyond the world of retail.

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Mission Statement:

I feel like I need to be clear up front on what this book is, and what it is not. This book is meant to be a humorous, charming and informative look at our personal journey with chickens. We have added them to our tribe, and have enjoyed owning them. In the process of owning, and researching to own, I have learned a lot. I would like to provide you with a low barrier of entry point that gets you excited to own chickens, and give you the basic tools to care for them.

This book is NOT, nor was it meant to be, an exhaustive treatise on chicken breeds, health or ownership.

Why? Because those books are boring and dense. Chickens are delightful little creatures that bring joy to any yard or home. To pack them into some dense tome is to do an injustice to these birds. Once you have some, and you are excited about them, you can research to your hearts content. If you wait until you know everything there is, you will be bored with them.

My goal is to walk you through the choices we have made, and give you our reasoning behind it, to allow you to come to your own conclusion. Learn from our successes, and our mistakes, then get out there into the awesome world of backyard chickens on your own.

Introduction:

So, you are thinking about getting chickens. I could take the short approach and just say, go get them you won't regret it.

No seriously go.

Still here? Well, I guess you want to more details and information why. Maybe you have a reluctant spouse that you need to get on board. Maybe you just feel like you need to justify to yourself or to the neighbors why you have some cute feathery girls running around the yard instead of (or in addition to) the usual flight of acceptable useless suburban pets. Whatever your hold up is right now, my mission is to get you to welcome these delightful little critters into your yard. If every home in America had a chicken or two in the back yard, this would be a happier, healthier place.



Our girls playing in the yard

Here at the Ayers house, we have a small flock of 12 laying hens in the backyard. I have to admit, at first I was a little hesitant to get chickens. I was on board with the idea, but they really seemed like a lot of work, and it was very early in my homesteading transformation. However, I have to say I was wrong. These delightful birds are an absolute joy to watch and play with, in addition to providing a ton of nutritious food. In fact, just two hens per person can lay enough eggs for you to never run out. They just scamper around the backyard, scratching, foraging and hunting. When you come outside, they all run over to mooch food and love. If you have ever been considering getting some chickens of your own, I would wholeheartedly say go for it.

See, the advantage I have, is that I was originally the reluctant spouse. I didn't have to do the work to convince anyone, I just had to be convinced, that's much easier. My wife came to this whole homesteading idea much faster than I did, and as the ladies in the audience can attest to, nothing is

harder than bringing along a husband who has assumed the mental equivalent of a three year old laying limp on the floor. You will wear yourself out much faster trying to drag him, than just leaving him on the floor. So whatever your particular hurdle is, I will try to give you the informational arrows to fill your quiver. Where you go play cupid is up to you.

Why you should own chickens:

To me, there are three main benefits to owning chickens, healthy bodies, healthy gardens, and healthy souls. Owning chickens can address all three of these needs, in ways that I never would have imagined before I owned them.

Healthy Bodies:

The first benefit of chickens is the health benefit they bring to your diet. Almost all Americans eat eggs on a regular basis, so that is an incredibly easy way to boost the level of nutrition coming into your body. Look at the difference between a store egg, and a fresh egg from the yard.



Store bought egg on top, homemade in front

The egg in the front is straight from a chicken. Notice the darker orange color of the yolk, and the much whiter look of the egg whites. That store bought egg in the back will seem pale and insipid once you have eaten some high quality eggs from your own yard. The flavor can't even begin to compare. Real eggs actually have a flavor all their own, and the texture is so much better to eat. Plus, with fresh eggs from your yard, you can bring back all of those raw egg culinary creations that are basically lost to time at this point. You can make fresh Mayo, or smoothies or meringue. With a flock you own, as long as you never feed them raw chicken or eggs, there is zero danger of salmonella. Ever.

Now, something to consider when thinking of your flock. What are you going to do with extra eggs, or do you only want how many eggs you can handle? As I mentioned, we have a flock of 12 laying hens right now. On a normal day we get between 6 and 9 eggs a day. That's about 5 dozen a week. If you aren't prepared for it, that can be a lot to handle. Just storing a week's worth in the fridge is a tremendous undertaking.

So plan ahead with what you will do. If you are going to acknowledge that you will have extra, build a plan now. Will you store them? Will you sell them? Will you give them away? Right now we either make an effort to eat things with a lot of eggs in them, like egg drop soup, or we give them away to the people I work with and our neighbors.



About two days worth of eggs

If you don't want any extra, and just want to eat them all, first come up with a realistic number of how many you eat. Keep track of how many eggs you eat each week for a week or two. Take into account any meals you like to make that are egg heavy. Once you get that number, do some quick math. If you only need an average of two eggs a day, get three hens. If you need 8 a day, get 10 hens. If you select your breeds for egg production, like Orpingtons for example, you can get about 5 eggs a week from each bird. So you basically get a bird for each egg, plus a ringer or two.

The chicken meat from a fresh chicken is equally superior to its pale store bought counterpart, but visually you can't tell as much, so I didn't include a picture. We successfully slaughtered one of our roosters, and he was very flavorful, though somewhat skinny. However, we are lucky enough to have a local butcher shop in the area where we can get free range natural chicken. It does cost more, but its vastly superior meat. The texture is much denser and juicier, and has an actual flavor. You can eat this chicken with just salt and pepper, and its GOOD. It isn't slimy like store chicken, and it doesn't stink. In our current flock and setup, harvesting our own chickens for meat isn't in the cards, but if you can, I would recommend it. If you can't, take the extra time to find a local source. Go to a local butcher, or trade with a neighbor. Its a great way to build community, and eat healthier.

Healthy Gardens:

The next benefit is healthy gardens. Chickens are living, clucking, adorable compost factories. They will eat just about anything that you throw out into the yard for them, and within 24 hours. Its compost. If you use the deep litter method, which I will cover later in the book, they can be creating huge piles of compost in their coop constantly as well.

Chickens are great at cleaning out areas of dense weeds as well. Have an overgrown area you want to plant a garden on? Throw down some fencing and release some chickens. Finished with a raised bed? Let the chickens on it to remove the finished plants. Less chicken feed to buy, and instant fertilizer for your cover crops. Have tall weeds that grow in your backyard each year? Once we let our chickens loose, the weeds never got more than an inch high. Geoff Lawton actually did a great video on using chickens to clear out space for future growth, you can watch it [here](#) if you like, or view the chicken only excerpt [here](#).

All plants need animal inputs at some point, so if you have any interest in gardening at all, get some chickens. Certainly it's better to have a living, friendly, egg producing source of compost than to drive to Home Depot every spring and plunk down your money for compost from a bag. Its cheaper, and you know where its coming from. Your plants will thank you.

Healthy Souls:

The last benefit to owning chickens is honestly the one I least expected. They just bring happiness wherever they go. They are like owning a cat that actually gives something back to you. My favorite part of the day, is getting home from work, saying hello to my lovely wife, and going out to pet my chickens. I can just feel the stress melting away as they scamper over to say hello. Their cute little feathers blowing in the wind, and they squat down so you can pick em up.



Our rooster peeking in the door

On weekends, there is nothing more relaxing than sitting on the porch watching the chickens playing in the yard. They scamper happily on the secondary coop I built them out of pallets. and the former goat feeder that's now a hen hay holder.



Chickens playing on their jungle gym

I can look out any random window in my house, preferably while holding a cup of coffee, and watch what my wife and I call "Chick TV". Something about being able to watch them at all times, just makes owning them very beneficial to my well being, and I know it would be to yours too.

I hope, if you were on the fence about getting chickens, this helped to sway you towards buying one. There are a ton of benefits to owning chickens, for your body, your garden, and your soul. Yet for me, the most important thing that I learned, is that owning chickens is satisfying and fun. There is a reason backyard chickens are taking off, so experience it for yourself.

Where to get your Chickens:

So SOMEONE has convinced you that getting your own chickens will be awesome, and you have decided to take the plunge. Good for you. You will most likely enjoy every moment of owning your bumbling, adorable birds. But where do you get them from, and what do you do once they show up? If you are like me, you will be nervous about caring correctly for your cute little fluff balls. That's perfectly normal.

First, some general advice about new life, no matter what kind it is. Relax. All animals have an inherent will to survive. All you have to do is not screw it up, and provide for them. They will do fine, and you will do fine. So just breathe.

In terms of where to get them, there are hundreds of different options online, as well as any local options in your area. I am a strong believer in supporting local business, so if you know a neighbor or a local shop in your area that has a breed you want, go for it.

When we got our chicks, we used Efowl.com. We had pleasant, quick service from them, and I would order from them again. We ordered 15 chicks, and ended up with an extra. Two died while very young, and we were refunded for our purchase price. We also ordered all females, and ended up with two roosters. We also received a credit for them. Service was prompt and responsive, so I would have no problem recommending them if you don't have a preference.

If you don't know, when you order chickens online, they are shipped in the mail in a box. So you want to have a brooder setup ahead of time, as they will need to be warmed up as soon as they arrive. Also, holding a box full of little peeping fluff balls is one of the cutest things you will ever get to do.



Picture this, but peeping

The mail man will not deliver the chickens to your house, they will call you when the box arrives at your local post office, and you will have to go get them. So make sure that you have good communication with your source so you know when they ship so you can arrange for them to be picked up. A measure of both how popular chickens are, and where I live, is the fact that when we went to get our chickens at the post office, they were one of two shipments there that day. I am glad they gave us

the right box.

Selecting a Chicken:

No doubt when considering chickens, you will find that there are tons of varieties to choose from, and you may get a little lost. In fact, one of my favorite free publications is the catalog from McMurray Hatchery. I just love flipping through it and seeing all of the different breeds available and learning a bit about them. I am by no means an expert on chickens, but we have a happy healthy flock, so I will share our thought process with you so you can make your own choices.

Hybrid Vs. Heritage:

There are two main types of chickens. Hybrid chickens, also known as Cornish Crosses, which are the big dumb white chickens you see on TV. These chickens are designed to fatten up to slaughter weight in about 6-8 weeks, so they grow extremely fast. As a side effect, they really won't live that long, versus a more proven heritage breed.

These are a natural hybrid, not a genetic monstrosity, so they are OK to own if you want quick meat, but weren't what my wife and I wanted. A heritage chicken is essentially an old school purebred. They can live happily for several years producing for you, although they don't mature to slaughter weight, or lay eggs as quickly as a cross. They also are a little living time capsule, with a genetic legacy stretching back to older farm times, so it can be cool to learn where they come from.

When you get into heritage breeds, there is an incredible selection and diversity. Each chicken breed was often created for a reason, such as desirable visual traits or food based traits. Some are good layers. Some are good meat birds. Some do better in cold climate. Some do better in hot climate. With a little digging and research, you can select a breed perfect for either your food output, your environment, or just a desirable bird to entertain you.

In the end, we selected three different heritage breeds for use in our own flock, and if I had it to do over again, I would buy two of them again. I would say that's pretty good for having never owned chickens before. When we were making our selections, we mainly wanted egg laying production, with the option of meat birds. We eat a significant amount of eggs, and butchering your own chickens is a difficult hurdle to cross when first getting started. We also picked birds that are cold hardy, because despite living in the desert, it gets quite cold here in the winter. In addition, with us planning a move to the Pacific Northwest, we wanted the option to be able to take our birds with us.

Buff Orpington:

Orpingtons were originally created in 1886 in Kent, County England by merging three different lines of chickens together. They didn't take off in America until 1895, when they were shown in New York. They started to be replaced by the hybrids in the 20's, the same as most chickens, but they are making a comeback today. These have to be the best chickens we own. They are sweet, they hunt and scratch on their own, and they are tremendous layers. They also plumped up nicely, but mine are not the 3-4 pounds of slaughter weight they are supposed to be. We never put any effort into fattening them up. If we did, I am sure they would be bigger. They lay medium to large sized light brown eggs. If you want to own an easy going, very friendly chicken, that is a gentle way to get started, get these girls. They are so friendly they will make themselves right at home by jumping right up into your lap.



Welsummer:

Welsummer chickens are probably what you think of when you think of a rooster. Why? Cornelius, the Cornflakes rooster was a Welsummer. Think brownish rooster with a bright green iridescent tail. These guys originated in the Netherlands in the early 20th century from a mixture of local breeds. They are supposed to be good dual purpose birds, although our girls remain skinny, they lay fairly well. Their eggs are a medium brown with dark chocolate speckles. They are actually in critical stage as a breed, and fairly rare, so owning them was kind of cool as a piece of history.

Then you find out why they are rare. Because they are bitches. They yell, they peck, they boss the other girls. They aren't nearly enough of a payout to be worth owning in my book. We are actually looking for a new home for our Welsummer girls, so if you want chickens in Tucson, let me know. Maybe they will like you better.

Their one redeeming quality, is that they are excellent hunters and foragers. If you are getting chickens because you have a bug/critter problem that you want controlled, or you want them to act as weed control for you, these are an excellent breed to consider. They will go after any pests that come into the yard with a vengeance. All of the chickens we have perform in this role, but if you specifically want a hunter, Welsummers deserve a second look. Just don't expect them to listen to you, or be friendly.



Salmon Favorolles:

I have to say, my turn around on these chickens is dramatic. I didn't like them at first, now, they might be my favorite. They are absolutely adorable, and super sweet. They are the first ones to hear movement in the house, and run over to see whats going on.

These little girls were originally developed near the village of Favorolle, which is just southeast of Paris, and introduced into America in 1902. The key here is what they were bred for. They were created for winter egg laying and production. They have 5 toes, feathered feet and a little muff to help keep them warm during cold weather. They are excellent sitters and mothers. They are very cold hardy, and are laying stronger than ever now that its colder. These ladies will do just fine in Idaho, where we are going. They lay medium-size light brown to cream colored eggs. They are actually a threatened species here in the US, and their line is in danger of dieing out. If you want hours of entertainment, get these girls. A mixed flock of these and some Orpingtons is just awesome.

They are not excellent foragers, but they will eat just about anything thats given to them. They are not picky in any way, and are a great way to turn kitchen waste into eggs. Even after having them for 9 months, I wouldn't say they would be worth eating, so if looking for a meat bird, look elsewhere.



Choices from the Community:

I have to say, this section is a lot of fun for me. In January 2013 on Facebook my wife Jenn sent out the call to our [Facebook](#) community at Tribal Future, asking what their favorite breed of chickens was. Now, this made me smile for two reasons. First, the response was huge, with a bunch of people responding. Second, we got about 20-30 different breeds suggested to us, which was basically each person suggesting a unique breed. That makes me incredibly happy to see. We, as a collective homesteading community, are actively involved in preserving and maintaining an important genetic legacy, and that's something my wife and I are very passionate about. Each of these birds is a unique message from the past, and it's important to preserve that.

If you haven't heard of them before, the ALBC, or [American Livestock Breeds Conservancy](#), is doing some great work on preserving these lines. They are currently working to preserve more than 200 breeds of livestock, and have been since 1977. I am not a member yet, although I plan on becoming one once we complete our move. Member or not, they are a great resource for those who are interested in preserving our animal past.

So as an added bonus, I decided to spotlight three additional breeds selected by our community that will also make great started chickens. A disclaimer, these are not chicken breeds I own, but they were recommended to me by our readers, so my information is not first hand. The best way to learn about chickens, is to get some for yourself, but I am lucky to be part of an excellent community, and I trust their judgment as a great place to start.

The Barred Rock :

There was simply no way I could not include these little chickens in a list, as not only were they submitted by three different readers, but I have seen them repeatedly at our local feed store. The barred rock is not actually "in danger" anymore, as according the the ALBC there is a breeding pool of more than 10,000 in the world. Feedback on these chickens is universally positive, and are something I will look into when we do move to colder climates. They and the Orpingtons seem to fill similar roles, and both do well in the cold.

The Barred Rock is one of the all time popular favorites in this country. Developed in New England in the early 1800's by crossing Dominique's and Black Javas, it has spread to every part of the U.S. and is an ideal American chicken. Prolific layers of brown eggs, the hens are not discouraged by cold weather. Their solid plumpness and yellow skin make a beautiful heavy roasting fowl. These chickens are often called Plymouth Rocks, but this title correctly belongs to the entire breed, not just the Barred variety.



Cochin :

Cochin chickens were suggested by two different readers. One described them as gentle, the other described them as cute but useless. So I would say this sounds like a great starter chicken if you aren't sure if you like chickens, but they might not actually do much for you. I happen to personally like cochins ever since I saw one in the Phoenix zoo.

Side note, the Phoenix zoo is a sprawling complex of rare animals from around there world. What was my favorite part? The barnyard exhibit. Go figure.

These guys are listed as watch, which means there are less than 5,000 in the US, and less than 10,000 in the world. I do know they are good for cold weather because their feet feathers protect them.

Cochin chickens are great eaters of food, and indiscriminate in their preferences. This combined with their unmatched profuseness of feathering make them an ideal choice for colder climates and gives them the ability to eat enough to produce both animal heat and eggs during the heart of winter. They feather slowly, but are very hardy and, like the Brahma chicken, will thrive under conditions where other breeds would perish. Cochins are predisposed to becoming too fat. Such fattening can stop egg production and even lead to death by disorder of the liver. Lewis Wright, in his book *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, circa 1892, recommended that Cochins should receive a daily ration of green food to keep them healthy, which is good advice for any chicken.

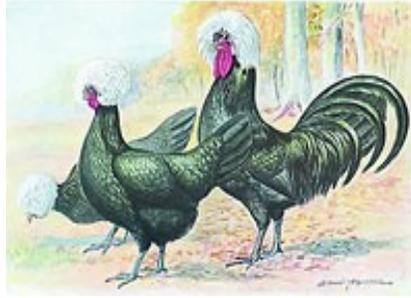


Polish:

The last chicken to spotlight is the Polish chicken, which is also listed on the watch list. I had seen them before in hatchery catalogs, but I have to say the best description ever came across our Facebook feed, when one of our tribes-people described them as looking like muppets. I laughed of course, then after I looked again, damnit they do look like muppets. I can never un-think that now.

Polish chickens have many interesting characteristics. They are excellent layers of medium-sized white eggs, tending to begin a bit late in the season but persistently laying once they commence. Polish chickens are non-sitters and rarely will go broody. Their crests tend to obscure their vision, which makes them more prone to aerial predators. However, by carefully trimming the feathers near their eyes their vision will be less obscured. Polish chickens are easily surprised and a bit nervous, so care

should be taken not to startle them. They are similar to Leghorns in both size and type. And Polish chickens come with or without beards on their faces.



So once again, my plea is the same as always. If you are considering getting chickens, or any livestock, please consider a heritage breed. Once that legacy is lost, we will never be able to get it back.

Time for the brooder:

Since chickens are shipped live, young and fragile, you will need to do some work before they get home. You will want to have a supply of food for them, a water dish, a heat lamp and a brooder.

A brooder is basically a box that holds you chickens, and allows them to be protected, and warmed with a heat lamp. There are as many ways to make one as there are people with imaginations, but ours worked out really well for us, so I will share it. For another look at brooders, check out [this video](#). He is very good at presenting his brooder.



Dog crate with modifications

This is an old dog cage that we had from my wiener pug, which was basically three feet long, and about 18 inches across. This was actually the perfect size, as it allowed the peeps to self regulate their temperature. When they got cold, they ran under the light, too hot, they ran to the shady end of the pool. Some people recommend using the pine chips as bedding for your peeps. We chose not to do this, as the dust can be hard on their little lungs. Instead, we used some puppy pee pads, and changed them twice a day. We chose it to protect their lungs, but I think the pee pads actually ended up being a heck of a lot easier to clean up too. Just roll em up, and pitch em.

The heat lamp is vital for keeping these little peeps going. At one point our electricity went out for about 20 minutes. Fortunately, this was in May and we had some sun warmed bricks just outside our patio. As soon as the power went out I noticed the chicks huddle together for warmth so I grabbed them all up and put one of the warm bricks in the bottom of a tote bin. They all jumped on top of each other and the warm brick. While, it is not necessary to use a red heat lamp bulb, it is recommended. The peeps will sleep much better with a red bulb versus a white bulb.

You will notice as your new editions become a little bit older they will become fascinated with pecking at each others eyes. You may notice this more with all yellow or white peeps than with peeps that have darker fluff or markings around their eyes. The red heat lamp will actually help limit the 'eyeball pecking' as we called it. Do not worry, they will grow out of this in just a few weeks. It is the equivalent of a two year old picking their nose. Well, most kids grow out of it.



Notice the poop, this is why pads are a good thing

As you can see, we just clipped the heat lamp onto the side. We were able to get the heat lamp, thermometer and bulb all from Amazon.com, and it was a lot cheaper than buying it locally. Your exact options will vary, but as long as it keeps the peeps warm, you are good to go. As you can see, we also put cardboard inside the cage walls. This serves to both keep the peeps contained, drafts off of them and it also anchors the sides of the pee pads. If the pads were not anchored, the peeps would just rip them up and poop under them.



The thermometer in one of its two days of use

At first we had the thermometer laying on the bottom of the cage, because we were panicked that the temperature would fluctuate wildly and our chickens would die. Then we learned the advice I mentioned above, and learned to relax a little. They want to live. So we hung a towel on one side of the cage, and let them just run back and forth to regulate themselves. Use the thermometer if you like,

but we took ours out after two days, so it might be better just to relax. It is recommended that the warm side be about 100 degrees for the peeps when they first arrive. As they grow, you can reduce the temperature on the warm side of the cage by 5 degrees each week they grow. This can be done by raising the heat lamp and monitoring with the thermometer. However, we just watched the peeps' actions and moved the heat lamp up a few inches after a few weeks.

It's best to monitor their behavior, as they will give you signs if they are in distress. If they are spending all their time under the lamp, they are too cold, if they are always on the shady side it's too hot. Their placement in the cage will tell you if you need to make adjustments. You do not want your peeps to be huddled together all of the time. If they do pile on top of each other for extended periods of time, the peeps on the bottom could suffocate. Notice the picture below, the chicks are distributed throughout the cage. That's what you want.



Notice the peeps spread evenly between light and dark, also the cat waterer.

The first thing you have to do when you get your peeps in the brooder is teach them where to drink. You have to pick them up, and actually dip their beaks in the water until they open them and take a drink. Otherwise they may not make it. It's important to do this fairly quickly, as peeps can go days without food, but not nearly as long without water. If yours were mailed, it will have already been a few days since they got a drink. You don't want to wait too long.

They have been surviving off of the yolk sack from the egg they hatched from. They will survive for about 3 days without food or water from hatching but not much longer. Your peeps may be well into their third day without water by the time you receive them. We found a great water dish to use was our cat's old waterer, seen in the picture above. It keeps them in water for awhile, with no danger of them spilling it by turning over a bowl.

Catching a Chill:

If you notice any peeps that have gotten wet, try to dry them with an absorbent towel near the heat

lamp until they are dry. Peeps can catch a chill very easily and this can kill them. We had one of our Orpingtons caught a chill when she was just a few days old and she became listless and very sleepy. We figured out it was due to a chill and warmed her with a soft cloth near the heat lamp and she pulled through. Another one that caught a chill wasn't as lucky.

Now a surprise to me, was that chickens start eating solid food from day one. So we fed them the medicated starter feed what we actually got from Wal-Mart, although you can buy it many places. Medicated starter feed is recommended because, like human babies, peeps do not have an immune system yet. If they come in contact with germs they could become very sick.

The most common thing they can get is Coccidiosis or Brooder Pneumonia. Coccidiosis is a parasitic infection that will cause loose, watery and sometimes bloody stool and Brooder Pneumonia is a fungal infection of the lungs. These illnesses can be avoided by keeping their brooder and water clean. You can also add some garlic into their water since it will help kill any fungus. The peeps will love it but it does get kind of smelly. We add fresh garlic into our chickens food all the time, now that they are outside the smell is much more tolerable. Trust me, it is not always easy, but if you clean it when you get up and before bed the peeps will grow up happy and healthy.

Given their tendency to poop on everything, but realizing that they eat a lot, we needed a way to keep their food feeding out slowly, but low enough they could reach it. Cue a cottage cheese container on a plate. Poke a couple holes in the bottom, and viola. Instant time delay peep feeder that's relatively poop resistant and inexpensive. As the peeps grew we placed their feeder on top of a small brick from the yard. This allowed them to reach up, nibble on their food and keep it above their little butts. This helped keep the food poop free as they got taller.



A poop resistant, but not nap resistant, feeder

Paste Butt:

Something you will need to watch for is for the peeps to get Paste Butt which we jokingly called

“wiping peep butts”. This is when the peeps digestive system is just starting and the poop can get stuck on their fluff and dry covering their vent. This can be removed by wetting a paper towel, cotton ball or even a Q-tip with fairly warm water and placing it on the dried poop. If the peeps vent is blocked and it can not relieve it's self it could actually die. After you have removed the pasted on poop the peep may relieve itself right after wards. We were lucky and only had 2 or 3 peeps that had a paste butt issue and it was noticed pretty quickly. Just remember to warm the chick back up and make sure it is thoroughly dried with an absorbent cloth or towel. Don't just place the peep back in the brooder with a wet bum. It raises the chances of it catching a draft and getting a chill.

Once it is about 3-4 weeks old you are pretty much in the clear and won't have to wipe any more peep butts. If paste butt seems to be an issue you can give the peeps some yogurt to help the essential bacteria for in their guts. We gave ours plain but if you have flavored they will eat that too. We gave our peeps yogurt from their second day here for about 2 weeks. We feel that it offered a more natural way to help the body fight off disease will give a stronger natural immune system.

At first your peeps will be too small to do much of anything, but shortly they will learn to roost. We ended up with a plastic box in the cage, pictured above and below, with several boards running through the cage rails, this gave them places to practice roosting and perching. Along with peeping, flapping, falling and taking turns playing airborne attack on each other. I wish I had been able to record their antics at the time. Chickens naturally like to sleep up off the ground, and it made them very happy as peeps to have this option. Pictured below is miss Downy, one of our Orpingtons, roosting on her box. She basically lived on that thing till we let them outside. It was adorable.



Miss Downy, being adorable

Hopefully you now feel comfortable both ordering chickens, and building a brooder. Chicks are incredibly easy. Keep them warm, fed, watered and clean, and they will thrive in your care. You can also amuse yourself for hours just watching them scamper around the cage. One thing we did learn, is that if you hold them a lot as peeps, they will be friendly adult birds. Given how they scamper after us all day, I think it worked.

Vaccination:

We chose to not get our chickens vaccinated against Marek's disease. We decided not to because we had all of our hens delivered at the same time, from the same hatchery and it was a small flock. If you choose to have a flock larger than about 25 chickens you may reconsider. Marek's disease is a highly contagious viral disease in chickens that can cause tumors and paralysis. Even with the vaccine the chickens can still carry and spread the disease but the vaccine keeps them from getting tumors. We wanted our chickens to be as close to organic as we could and felt that this was not necessary for our situation. This was our personal decision and I do not regret it.

Our hens are happy, healthy and full of spunk. We do not want to scare you by telling you what common illnesses could happen. We just want you to be informed. You will find those people out there who say you have to do it exactly like they do. We want you to do what is best for YOU. Just because it worked for us, something else may work better for you.

This is a brief overview of what we did with our baby chickens. We had 14 out of 16 survive into big lovable chickens. For some more good information, a great book is [A chicken in every yard by Hannah Lit](#). Its an excellent book with lots of detailed information.

My final thought is simply this. The enjoyment you get from owning chickens greatly outweighs the work involved. Sure, at some point, you won't feel like changing those damn pee pads before bed. You will get mad the chickens pooped up their water again. You won't want to deal with it. They are worth it. So don't stress, relax, and enjoy the ride.

Time for the coop:

So you decided you want chickens, and they are safely in your brooder, now its time to build them a coop. I have to say, of my many chicken projects, I think I enjoyed this one the most. This is the project that taught me I like working with wood and working with my hands. I am certainly not going to say that its perfect, in fact I am going to outline my mistakes, and offer some suggestions for you to improve upon. Yet for someone who had shunned building projects all his life, I have to say it was a valiant first effort.

First, for some definitions. There are two main ways to keep your chickens, and there are two main types of structures for them. First, you can choose to either free range your chickens, or keep them in the coop at all times. We chose to allow ours to free range much of the time, since its good for them, allows them to supplement their own food, and spreads their soil benefiting qualities over they yard. My coop is made with that in mind. If you do not want to free range, you will want the nesting boxes and food and water to be accessible from the outside. Mine can only be accessed by opening the door and hunching inside. It's not a really big deal, but the chickens would all run out if you were trying to keep them contained.

Coop Vs. Tractor

The two main types of chicken structures are a coop versus a chicken tractor. A coop is a stationary structure of one sort or another, and a chicken tractor is on wheels. Although a tractor would be great in a setting with a lot of land, our yard was too small to bother with. When we move to our farm, I will build a chicken tractor and share the results. I certainly feel that its a more valuable and versatile permaculture tool than a coop, but it requires more vegetation than we have available.

I think overall our coop has been very successful, and the easiest way to show it off is with some pictures.



Front of the coop before hardware cloth was attached.

Here is our coop from the front. The overall dimensions of the structure are 8 X 8, or basically the length that I could use and make the fewest cuts possible on my boards. The run structure in the front is just made from 2X4s, and the building structure at the back is particle board pieces cut into 4X4 sections, and reinforced with 2X4s. If I had it to do over again, I wouldn't have cut the roof into two

4X4 sections. It creates a seam in the middle for water to get in. However, a 4X4 sheet fit in the back of my vehicle. A 4X8 wouldn't have.

Here you can see my framing a little bit better of the structure. The post in the center that holds all of the weight is a 4X4, its very strong. You can see the 2X4 supports running up the side of the wooden panels, as well as on the edge of the ceiling. Their purpose was to give me a surface to screw into, since obviously screwing into the end of a piece of particle board is a bad idea. The pieces on the top run right to the edge, and the pieces on the wall are inset the wide of a 2X4. This means that I was able to stand the walls up, screw them together, then just set the roof onto its braces. At that point its already secure, bolting it in just makes it better.



Framing view in the center

The next step is to add a working door. This is one of those two areas I would do better next time.



Showing you the door

My door is essentially a piece of particle board, hung onto the coop with 3 heavy duty hinges. It works OK, but it drags downward. It digs a furrow into the yard in front of the coop, and you kind of have to lift it up to reach its latch. It works, and its secure, but its kind of a pain.

The other mistake I made was not sloping the roof, or using any kind of shingles or tar paper. When it only rains for a few weeks a year, its easy to forget these things. When it does rain, the water just pools

on the roof instead of flowing to the sides. It will last us longer than we will live here, but when you build your own, don't forget to angle and protect the roof.

Predator proofing:

Now that your coop is built, its time to secure it from predators, and keep in the chickens. That involves a barrier. Classically folks use chicken wire for this, but we chose not to. Chicken wire still allows a hens head through, and a coyote in the yard could bite it off or hurt them. So we used hardware cloth with a 1/4 inch opening. It is more expensive, but a hell of a lot more secure. At first we secured the hardware cloth to the posts with zip ties, which did work well. Unfortunately, the harsh desert sun weakened them after a few weeks, so we attach it with those nails that look like staples now. Also, all of your girls pressing up against the side in one place will bust the ties. Amazing what a hungry cluck can do.



Note the many zip ties, give it a few week

Lastly, you just have to add your food, water, and clucks. Pooping in the food was still an issue, so we hung a cat litter pan from the ceiling, and put a cinder block in front of it so they could reach. For the water, we just moved our cat waterer from the brooder out here with them. When they got bigger, we used the litter pan for water, and a shoe box for food. Throw a few buckets in their and a board to perch on, and you have some happy healthy little birds. When they got older, we did add a roosting shelf and some nest boxes to the coop, but won't need them for the first few months.



We broke with conventional wisdom a little bit when putting our clucks in the coop. We put ours out at a month old, and ran an extension cord out for their heat lamp if they needed it. Everywhere we looked told us they had to stay in the brooder for two months. Maybe we just found the wrong sources, but there was no way they would all fit in the brooder at two months old. Plus our house would have smelled like chicken poop way longer than we were OK with. We turned on their heat lamp for about a week until we saw they weren't even using it. After that, they continued to grow up happy and healthy.

I knew nothing about working with wood when I built this, and I built it in an afternoon. So no matter what your skill level, you can build this yourself. By using my AAR, you should be able to build it even better than me. Good luck, and enjoy!

Adding a roosting shelf

As I mentioned, after the chickens got larger, we added a roosting shelf for them to sleep on in the evening. It's four feet long, so the width of the first part of the coop, and about two feet wide to give them space to sleep. I used a rough frame of 2X4s, then I covered it with the same hardware cloth as the outside to allow poop to fall through. Its actually quite adorable to see them all tucked up there. I would take a picture of them, but by the time they bed down, its too dark to see them well.



Note the poop

So here is my shelf, now who can spot what's wrong with it? That's right. As the chickens got older, the poop stopped fitting through the hardware cloth, and builds up in patty form. The hardware cloth is clearly not effective, as it doesn't allow for an easy waste pass through.

There are really two options to go with. You can build a shelf that uses larger wire, like the stuff that you would use to fence off a small tree, or you can pile litter up on the shelf to absorb the poop and just scrape that off all at once. In the near future, I believe I will be building a new shelf with the larger hardware cloth on it. Just be sure not to use chicken wire, their feet could become tangled in the very large holes and they could get injured.

Nest Boxes

Once your hens reach laying age, you will need to give them somewhere to lay their eggs, or they will lay all over the yard and every day will be like an Easter Egg Hunt. If you have the ability to work it into your design, having your nest boxes accessible from the outside can make your life easier. Unfortunately, I didn't think that far ahead, so my boxes can only be accessed by hunching inside the coop. Again, not a big deal, but something that could easily have been avoided in the future.

Also, be aware that conventional wisdom about how, when and where chickens lay can be wrong. All of the resources that we found told us that the girls would like to lay with their boxes up off of the ground, and they would want somewhere visually screened so they could have privacy. Well, both of those things are not true.

Our girls favorite spot to lay is a hole they dig into the litter in the coop. A hole that's conveniently located right next to the nesting boxes that we thoughtfully provided for them. We tried stacking the boxes vertically, so that they could have some height to lay in, but they never even ventured into the top ones, they proffered being at ground level.

The privacy myth is also a joke for our girls. The way our coop is setup, with the run being 2ft tall, and the coop being 4ft, they can jump up onto the run and basically see into the coop. We put up a couple pieces of ply wood as a wind and sun screen for them, which leaves about a foot wide opening

up there. That spot has become a favorite laying area. Why? Because they can look into the coop and show off while they are laying.

I am not mentioning this because I know for sure that your hens will do these same behaviors. Yours might follow the text book example of how a hen is supposed to act. I am merely pointing out that sometimes the conventional wisdom is wrong, and if you are too rigid in your thinking, you might build a coop only to have to modify it later.

Controlling poop with deep litter:

Chickens poop. A lot. This can be both a blessing and a curse depending on how you approach the problem. After all, in permaculture, we teach that the problem IS the solution, if you know how to approach it correctly. So rather than viewing chicken poop as an inconvenience, we are looking for a way to turn it into something beneficial. One way to make that happen is with the deep litter method in the coop.

So what is the deep litter method? Its exactly what it sounds like. Its tossing in a deep layer of bedding material such as straw or alfalfa and pine shavings or rice hulls, and letting the chickens smash it down into the ground. Be sure to not use cedar chips because it is too hard on the chickens respiratory system. Ours is usually about 6 inches deep when we toss it in, which compacts down to about 3 inches once they stomp on it. You notice that in almost all of the photos of the chickens, you can see them standing in a bed of alfalfa. That is us, deep littering our chicken flock. It sits in the bottom of their coop, and catches all of the poop. So you don't really have to get in there and clean anything up. In the six month we have owned our flock. I have not cleaned anything inside of the cage other than the shelf, and all I do then is knock the poop off into the litter. My coop doesn't smell, and it isn't dirty. It just breaks down into compost underneath the layer.

You can use really any type of organic components that you like, as long as they aren't too big. Chickens have a natural tendency to root around and scratch at the ground. So this action causes everything to get torn apart into smaller and smaller pieces. You can encourage this by tossing some corn or other treats into the coop from time to time. They are much more willing to scratch if they find food for their effort.

In our run they will actually root down and make a little bowl that they can sun themselves in. Its quite adorable to see a pile of boneless chicken flapping around in the sun. We choose to use alfalfa in ours, because despite the slightly higher cost, when the chickens eat it they get some nutrition. If we used straw, the littering would still work the same, but the girls wouldn't get a benefit.

This method is incredibly healthy for the soil. Now under our coop if you scratch down a couple inches through the alfalfa, you can see some of the richest dirt in Arizona. Our yard consists primarily of sand and rocks, but under here some rich brown dirt is forming. Anyone that moves our chicken coop after we move will have a perfect spot for a garden. Its actually the first place in Arizona I have seen the little gray roly polly bugs. I didn't even think they lived here till I was poking around under their water bowl one day. You can also scoop this bedding out every month or so and toss it on your garden. Its an incredibly nitrogen rich snack for your soil, and the bedding is composting the poop, so it won't scorch your plants.

We really haven't seen a downside to doing this yet, so I have no issues to warn you about. I did learn that the method works best if you have a moist environment. Obviously, living in the desert is not moist, so if we go too long without rain, I like to take the hose and give the mixture a good soaking when the girls aren't in it. This helps keep it breaking down the way its supposed to. I noticed this was an issue late last year. When we went three months without rain, the coop still felt clean, but the alfalfa wasn't breaking down very well. An hour of rain, and I swear the alfalfa was half the size. So hosing it off is no alternative for rain, but it gets the job done.

So if you want a cheap, simple way to keep your coop clean, and your girls happy. Go for the deep litter. It certainly beats cleaning out a poop coop by hand.



See? Happy in the litter

Some Lessons about eggs:

If you are reading this, I am assuming you know more about how chickens produce eggs than my minions at work, but some of their questions would probably make you laugh anyway. Be prepared as a new chicken owner to be asked questions that will make you smile. The level of ignorance around chickens and where our food comes from in general is astounding.



Straight from the chicken's butt

So like anyone else with more than two chickens per person, I have an excess of eggs. Now, this is a great thing, so we share them with our neighbors, friends and the guys that I work with. We don't charge people for them, it really isn't worth it to on this small scale. I view it as one of the ways I minister. What better way to spread the message about real foods and health than to plopp some real healthy food down into someones lap. No one can argue that way.

I have learned a few interesting things about eggs and laying though, that maybe you didn't know either, and someone you give eggs to for the first time certainly won't know.

“How do your chickens lay without a rooster?”

That was one from work. They lay just fine without a rooster, but the hens can brood till doomsday, and no babies are coming.

“Do roosters lay too?”

Also from work. Just letting that one go.

“How many eggs do you get?”

From our flock of twelve, we get anywhere from 2 to 9 eggs a day, with most days getting about half a dozen.

Two things that I personally learned since getting chickens are these.

First, chickens stand up to lay. When you see hens sitting in the nest box, they are just waiting. When they actually are laying, they stand up and lean back and push. I know this from peeking at one, and I wish I had my camera at the time, because it was really interesting to see.

The other things I learned, is that not only does each breed lay a different type of egg, but each chicken actually lays unique looking eggs. Those little bumps, splotches and marks aren't random. They are actually like a fingerprint for each girl. So most days we know not only which breed our eggs came from, but which girl. If I get a chance, I actually thank the girl that laid me my breakfast.

Feeding your flock:

So you decided on chickens, got them brooded, and built the coop. At this point, they are probably getting mighty hungry. You should probably feed them right about now. The question becomes though, what do you want to feed them? Chickens, in case you didn't notice, are living garbage disposals. They will eat anything that's smaller than them. I have seen them hork down leaves from the neighbor's tree, lizards, baby frogs, snakes, mice, dirt, fluff, and anything they can find. Suffice it to say, if they aren't eating what you are giving them, you are doing it wrong.

There are three main schools of thought on chicken food, free ranging, table scraps, and grain feed. There are pluses and minuses to each, and in all likelihood you will end up using some combination of the three.

First, free ranging. This is where the chickens run around your property eating whatever strikes their fancy. The pluses are that this is completely free, and you won't have a pest within sight of these beady eyed little food monsters. The downside is that the chickens won't put on much weight for slaughter, and unless you plant food specifically for them, they will strip your property bare.

Our girls spend their entire day free ranging in our yard and I would say about 20% of their diet comes from here. Chickens, like goats and cows, will eat what they need nutritionally. They pretty much know which plants are poisonous to them and will not eat them. Just like people get cravings for certain foods due to something in their body telling them they need it. Have you ever craved an orange? Your body may have been telling you it needed vitamin C.

The second, is to feed them table scraps. My wife and I certainly see the value in this, as it prevents waste from entering the landfill, and while not technically free, its money thats already spent. Our problem is that we eat almost everything we make. We would have veggies peels and cores, but very little actual food for them, so for us, this was an impractical way to feed them. We continue to give them any scraps that come up (except for chicken), and they love them.

We will actually go to the grocery store and when we see cheap fruits and vegetables we buy them for our flock. The chickens don't care if the vegetables you are buying them are beautiful and pristine. As long as they are not moldy it is fair game for them. Roughly, 20 -25% of their diet is made up of fruits and vegetables we provide for them.

The last way to feed them is with grain feeds of the kind you get at Wal-Mart or a feed store. We did do this for several months, but have swayed away from it for two reasons. One, you are what you eat, so just as eating McDonald's is bad for us, eating grain processed to crap is bad for chickens. In the words of a friend of ours, you don't want to know what goes into them. The other is that my wife Jenn is highly gluten intolerant, and we both are living a paleo lifestyle. Too much grain in the girl's diet was being passed on to us, and it was making my wife sick, just from eating their eggs. This is a prime example of why those store bought eggs are so pale and sickly yellow and a farm fresh egg has a vibrant orange yolk. The difference in nutrition is astounding.

So instead of dealing with this problem long term, we just decided to go ahead and make our own food. Keep in mind, this food is just meant to replace the grain we were getting from the store. The lion's share of their vitamins, nutrients and minerals comes from their eating either table scraps or free ranging. It's not meant to be a one shot food source.

So, our goal was to make something healthy for the girls that would replace the grain, and be cheaper to make than store bought feed. In our area, chicken food averages 33 cents a pound in the store, our homemade chicken food cost us 25 cents a pound. We found that in our area, Costco and Sam's have great deals on huge bags of rice and beans. They were the best deal we found, but since flavor isn't an

issue, shop around.

Here are the ingredients we used. If you can boil water, you got this covered. We used rice, pinto beans, some leftover mung beans (future batches will be just pinto), and we add a bit cracked corn in the yard. We used four cups of rice, in 9 cups of water. If you soak the rice in the water first before turning it on, it will cook faster. Make sure the rice is cooked through. Chickens don't care if the rice is mushy, be sure its cooked through. The “danger” to birds eating rice is when its raw.



The basic elements of food

Then we used 2 cups of pinto beans, and two cups of mung beans we happened to have left over. The next batch will just be pinto, but why waste them? Soak your beans overnight to reduce cooking time, but again, the key is to cook them through. Chickens don't mind mushy.

If you have a large crock pot you can also put the dried beans in it over night and they will be ready the next morning. We do reuse any extra water left over from the beans in the crock pot in the rice. The beans are a good source of protein for the chickens. If you have any freezer burnt or mystery meat in your freezer feel free to feed it to your chickens. We do not feed them chicken, it just seems wrong, but they love pork and beef. If there is a sale on any type of meat or fish at your local grocery store your chickens will love it. Just stay away from high sodium foods such as cured bacon and hot dogs. The high nitrate content and sodium content is not good for the chickens, just as it wouldn't be good for you to eat too much processed meat.

Time is usually the most precious resource in a house, so don't hesitate to boil these while you do other things. Homemade chicken food doesn't need much attention. Once it's all done, mix together in a big bowl. As you can see, ours filled two bowls.



This lasted them a week

We feed them about half a shoebox full of food a day for our twelve girls, then throw about a cup of cracked corn on their mixture when we give it to them. They dive right in and love it, and it lasts them right about 24 hours. We noticed that they tended to eat the pinto beans last, I believe because they are so large. If your chicken's aren't eating them, they are probably either not cooked enough, or they are too large. You can either mash them up, or just give them less food. If chickens have so much food they can be picky, you are working too hard.



Food Delivery

The only thing you have to do, is make sure you supplement their food with oyster shell. If you don't, their bones will start to deplete with egg laying. If you don't want to use oyster shell, you can feed their own egg shells back to them. You just have to roast them in the oven, and grind them up. So far we have chosen to use oyster shell, I just screwed a little bowl into the wall so it doesn't get spilled. We factored this into our costs when computing the homemade chicken food.

Our observations so far are very promising. The girls love their food, and they don't seem to be nearly as hungry during the day. They don't stand outside our door and belly ache for food nearly as much as they did in previous days. We have also noticed their poops getting smaller and less stinky. It seems their bodies are absorbing more of the food, rather than passing it as waste. We still plan on giving them our table scraps for random vitamins, but their food should meet their basic needs.

They have also, finally, started to put on some weight. Our chickens are about 9 months old and they were still extremely skinny. This was worrying enough with the cold nights, let alone if we ever wanted to harvest some. They have all put on a few extra ounces since we started feeding them, which is good for us.

So that's our recipe for homemade chicken food. For whatever reason, websites seem unwilling to give one out. Feel free to use ours, and have some happy, healthy clucks.

Treats for your flock:

Since we talked about a feed that we have been using on our girls, I figured I would throw out some treat ideas for your chickens, as well as a few snacks to avoid. Since, again, our feed was designed to give them the baseline bulk and calories that they need, but there is no way to put all of the protein and vitamins they need into one food.

Lettuce: No need to reinvent the wheel here. Lettuce is a great source of trace vitamins and minerals. Its also generally available for a couple heads for a dollar. We usually have one or two in the fridge for the girls at a time. We chop ours up, because our girls won't peck at the big pieces, but you can serve however you like.

Dairy: Our girls loves milk, yogurt, cheese, anything of that nature. Yogurt can be cheap, depending on sales and your area. Obviously they don't care if its flavored, so getting a big tub of plain yogurt is a great way to go. If yogurt is expensive, just get a gallon of milk. Put it in a dish for em, and watch them yum it up. Just put it far away from the house, because the girls will make a mess, and the ground can stink.

Tilapia (or fish of any kind): I don't know about your area, but protein in Tucson is very expensive right now. Most fish is expensive too, but if you keep an eye out for Tilapia, you can probably score some deals. I found Tilapia for buy one bag, get two free. Now Jenn and I refuse to eat Tilapia because of the disgusting farming practices for it, but chickens find it tasty. I like putting a frozen fillet in their coop at night, and its a thawed little treat by morning. Our flock really loves when we cut it into pieces and toss a few pieces out at a time. They love to think they got something special that they caught themselves.

Grapes: Now chickens love all fruit, but feeding grapes to chickens is a treat for us. We call it Bawk Bowling. We roll the grapes across the yard and watch the girls race their pudgy little bodies over to get it. Their are feather flying everywhere, and its awesome.

Lastly, I wanted to note something. People worry way too much about what you feed chickens. I had originally intended to give you three good treats, and then three things to avoid feeding your hens, just as kind of a baseline. Unfortunately all I found were sights [like this](#), that basically say everything except crumbs are toxic to chickens. Literally, this site lists Amaranth and Cabbage as poisonous right on the same list as belladonna.

We have been feeding our chickens most anything we have for six months now, and only seen one issue. One week recently, we were feeding the girls a LOT of citrus. I mean like, we got a bag of oranges, and it sucked, so we gave them to the girls. They ate a ton of them. Then we noticed a few weak spots on a few eggs. That's it. No eggs broke, no chickens died, just some thinning egg shells. We quit with the citrus, and the eggs are fine. So I personally believe the key is variety and moderation. You would die too if you ate nothing but one food, no matter what that food was, so mix it up and relax.

Harvesting your birds for meat:

This section doesn't really belong tucked right before the end of this book, but in a moment of author transparency here, I didn't know where else to put it. I merely thought it wouldn't be a complete book, if I didn't at least address this subject, in my very limited capacity. The reason why that capacity is limited is both because I have grown far more attached to my girls than I thought I would, and slaughtering our chickens is much harder than I ever thought it would be.

We did have two roosters initially in our flock, and for various reasons we decided to cull them from the flock. There are some great resources online for learning how to humanely kill your bird, and also how to successfully butcher them into edible form. We did successfully harvest the first rooster, but my wife is a better student than I am, and I failed to complete the second one without her help. So I am not going to go into details on how to make that happen here. I suggest learning from someone better suited to teaching you than me.

I will merely pass along my thoughts on the process, and what I went through, so that you can gain some perspective on it.

First, the emotional process was easier than I thought it would be. If you approach your chickens, and the food you eat, with the correct attitude, you will be fine. Chickens were put here for us to eat. The meat you buy at the store was killed for you by someone, and that chicken had a much worse life than the one you are slaughtering now. Thus you are not being cruel, you are being far kinder by both treating this bird with respect, and by removing some of the need for factory meat. You should always feel something when harvesting an animal, but you must remember what it was God put them here for.

Second, the physical process of killing a chicken is far harder than I ever would have imagined. I think this is perhaps why some chicken owners see them as so fragile. They really aren't. If you aren't prepared for that, it can be very difficult.

Third, learn how to butcher an animal quickly and humanely before you attempt it on your own. Go find somebody who knows how to do it well, and learn from them. Watch them, and help them if you can, so that when you go to do it, there is no needless suffering. Watching it done will give you a much better idea of the work involved, and knowing ahead of time what to do will make your life much easier.

Fourth, the process is long and involved. The reason people go to the store and buy their chicken is that it takes about 2 minutes to shop, and it takes more than an hour to process a chicken, at least when you don't know what you are doing. It's not something you are going to do every morning and have chicken for dinner, so don't pretend it will be. You will either slaughter a lot of them at once and store them, or you will hire someone to do it for you, if you can find someone that slaughters chickens.

Lastly, as I mentioned, I got much more attached to my chickens than I ever thought I would. Don't go buy 30 chickens expecting to raise them to slaughter if you have never butchered one. You might end up with 30 pets in your yard. Go slaughter one first. Make sure you can do it. You wouldn't be the first person to run into this, and there is no shame in it, but make sure first.

Those are my thoughts on slaughtering chickens. I still plan on raising my own meat birds in the future, but it's not in the cards right now. I am glad that I was able to slaughter the one that we did, and I now treat my food with much more reverence than I did before. It was a great learning experience, but you don't always learn what you think you will.

Final Thoughts:

Well here we are my friends, the conclusion. You decided to take the plunge and get some chickens. You got your brooder all set up. You have a better looking coop in the yard than I do. You know how to feed them food that they will love, and that's nutritious for them. You either have chickens on your acreage in the country, or you have joined the growing urban and suburban revitalization of our communities. You are either fortunate enough to live where its legal, you fought against the codes in your town, or you are keeping them hidden from the busy bodies in your area. Good for you. I am proud of you, and happy for you.

I have had so much fun spreading the chicken message in this book, and the feedback from everyone on our Facebook community has been phenomenal. Yet it made me so sad to here from some people, with variations on "I would love to keep chickens, but my community won't let me". How did we get to this point?

When did it become OK to have a perfectly manicured lawn that you hose down with toxins and petroleum, polluting the ground water, but not OK to have some fresh eggs? A chicken isn't any bigger or noisier than a small dog, but those are OK. Dog waste is a toxic substance to be hauled away, chicken waste is fertilizer. Shouldn't every town in America encourage chicken ownership?

It wasn't too long ago that they did. I happen to be a huge fan of old propaganda posters and old ads (as if those aren't the same thing). These ones are pretty common, but if you haven't seen them. Check em out.

**Uncle Sam Expects You
To Keep Hens and Raise Chickens**



**Two Hens in the Back Yard for Each Person
in the House Will Keep a Family
In Fresh Eggs**

EVEN the smallest back yard has room for a flock large enough to supply the house with eggs. The cost of maintaining such a flock is small. Table and kitchen waste provide much of the feed for the hens. They require little attention—only a few minutes a day.

An interested child, old enough to take a little responsibility, can care for a few fowls as well as a grown person.

Every back yard in the United States should contribute its share to a bumper crop of poultry and eggs in 1918.

**In Time of Peace a Prolifable Recreation
In Time of War a Patriotic Duty**

For information about methods of Back-Yard Poultry Keeping suited to your location and conditions, write

**Your State Agricultural College
or
The United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.**

This Space Donated by the Publisher

From 1918

This one was put out by the USDA in 1918, encouraging everyone in America to raise chickens to help feed the nation. Yes, this was because a large portion of our food was being shipped over to

Europe for the soldiers, but the government and the people still knew that the best way to feed its citizens was to have them raise food themselves.

As a side note, that's like a 5 year old kid fixing a roof. When the hell did we lose that? Most adults I know can't do a wood roof like that.



Just out for a goose walk

This is a woman walking a goose in New York in 1928. Now she might have been a 1928 hipster just trying to make a splash, but that harness looks bird specific, so I am guessing it was a thing.

Lastly, we have this World War 2 poster, also encouraging chicken owning. Now this one is from the UK, but that's because none of the Victory Garden posters I saw from the US had chickens on them. Even conceding that maybe the USDA was no longer pushing chickens, they were still pushing gardening.



World War 2. Also, get used to that look. The artist captured hungry hens very well, and an awake hen, is a hungry hen.

Then after that, nothing. As near as I can tell, all young people in the 50s and 60s just said, screw it. I have a car, I can go down to the store and get eggs rather than walking out to my backyard. In just 60ish years, we have completely turned our back on our cultural legacy, and are just now rediscovering where the best food comes from. Not from cellophane and Styrofoam. Not from a chicken barn with no vents, but from a small coop in a backyard. Kept by people that want to care for themselves, and for others.

I don't have some grandiose point to make here. This isn't a rant on the food supply or a condemnation of our government.

This is me saying thank you for reading my book, and I admire what you are doing. It takes great courage to be willing to not only step beyond cultural norms, but also to look at the cracks in the world, and fill them. You are taking control of your own destiny, and making a difference in the world. That is a trait to be admired. You are looking at our last 60 years and saying, no, that was wrong. This is better.

I am starting to feel that chickens are the gateway drug of homesteading. It's impossible to own one, and not want to get even more involved with the movement that's out there. Some of the friendliest and most helpful people I have met are chicken owners. A chicken owner is almost always willing to help you out, and show how it's done. I have gotten so much great feedback and advice, I can only hope that with this book I have been able to provide that advice for someone else. Thank you for reading this book, and I hope you continue to read my books, and my blog, far into the future.

You are doing great things, and what you do matters. Keep it up.