



WHAT EVERY OWNER SHOULD KNOW

- Birds unable to fly or ambulate normally due to wing clipping are more susceptible to attack by pets and wild animals, such as raccoons.
- It is advised to feed chickens before dark to allow them time to roost in safe areas away from potential predators.
- Chickens need attention at least twice a day so a “sitter” may be necessary when the caretaker is away.
- Interactions of small children with chickens should be monitored, and frequent hand-washing is recommended.
- Specific areas of the yard should be designated for digging and scratching to prevent access to potentially toxic plants and to protect gardens.
- A plan is necessary for finding homes for surplus chicks.

CHICKEN VITAL STATISTICS

Life span	10-11 years
Average weight	283-510 g (10-18 oz)
Range of weights	50-2000 g, depending on breed
Respiratory rate	12-37 breaths per minute
Heart rate	220-360 beats per minute
Rectal temperature	41.2°C (106.1°F)
Sexual maturity	1 year (laying eggs at 4-5 months)

FUN CHICKEN FACTS

- Chickens clean themselves by taking a dust bath.
- 60-70% of a hen’s day would naturally be spent grazing, pecking and scratching the ground.
- Chickens form complex social systems and like hanging out with their peers.
- Chickens experience REM sleep, which enables them to dream.
- Hens love to sunbathe.
- The color of the feathers around the hen’s earlobe determines the color the eggs will be.
- Hens can fly high enough to get into a tree or over a fence.
- Chickens are one of the few worldwide domesticated animals.

Various chicken breeds have developed from domestication of the red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) for different purposes. The recommendations in this brochure apply to individual chickens or small flocks that are kept as pets.

COMING SOON



HBD INTERNATIONAL

7108 Crossroads Blvd, Suite 325, Brentwood, TN 37027
Orders: 800-346-0269 • Support: 800-745-7329
Fax 615-221-9898 • www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com



PET
CHICKEN
CARE



PET APPEAL

Keeping chickens as pets is becoming increasingly popular in urban and suburban areas. Owners often bond with pet chickens and are willing to seek veterinary attention when needed. Chickens may be tamed, are entertaining and have unique, individual personalities that make them endearing to families. They are usually gentle but during the breeding season can be aggressive, especially males.

HOUSING

Outdoors

Chickens are usually housed in groups outdoors where they can eat grass and peck for insects. Chickens kept in single cages without appropriate foraging material often develop behavioral problems. Outdoor coops are ideal as they provide shelter and safety. The coops should be made of strong materials, be easy to clean and be dry and well ventilated. A shaded portion is essential in summer, and supplemental heat is necessary in winter climates. To prevent access by predators, wire sides or sheet metal should be extended underground, and the top should be covered with wire mesh.

Aviaries should be as large as possible. Roosts should be placed so that the tail or wing of a roosting bird does not touch the sides of the aviary. Dense nontoxic bushes may be planted so there are no sharp corners. Natural turf surfaces are best, with an area designated for dust/sand baths. Appropriate indoor substrates include shavings, sawdust, straw or recycled paper pellets to a depth of 6-8 inches (15-20 cm). The substrate should be changed routinely to prevent ammonia buildup. Clean nesting material, such as wood shavings, should be provided in the nests at all times.

Indoors

Many pet chickens reside in the home, with an area sectioned off by gates or pens. The substrate often consists of layers of newspaper with straw or hay, and many owners provide towels or blankets in a box for a roost. Chickens with access to carpet and other household items may entangle their nails or may ingest these materials, leading to gastrointestinal disorders.

Although many pet chickens appear to get along well with other household pets, such as dogs, cats or ferrets,

they should not be left unattended. Sleeping boxes or pen areas should be well-secured at night or when owners are not home so that these other pets do not have access to the chickens. Pet chickens should be offered some daily access to the outdoors and dust/sand areas for grooming.

Until baby chickens are 10 weeks old they need supplemental heat. For 1-week-old chicks, the room temperature should be 90°F (32°C) with a gradual dropping of 5°F (3°C) per week until the temperature is 70°F (21°C). At 4 weeks of age the floor space should be 1/2 ft² per chick, gradually enlarging to 5 ft² (0.5 m²) per chick at 21 weeks of age. The water and food containers should be placed outside of the hover brooders.

DIET

Many disorders of captive poultry are related to malnutrition. As with other birds, a seed diet is not an ideal diet nor is chicken scratch or cracked corn. Formulated diets, such as Harrison's Organic Chicken Food (www.Harrisonsbirdfoods.com/chickens), are available for pet chickens. Nutritional supplements, such as Sunshine Factor (www.HarrisonsBirdFoods.com), may be beneficial. The availability of fresh green plants to the diet provides the birds with nutritional diversity. Owners should refrain from offering their chickens any human foods. As an occasional treat, mealworms or earthworms are relished. Because obesity is a major problem in pet chickens, owners may need to measure out fed portions.

Birds that are not allowed to freely roam should have access to grit. The grit container should be emptied and refilled regularly with various sizes of grit because birds select only stones that are suitable for their body mass. Pellets have an adequate supply of calcium and should not be supplemented with lime or crushed shell. Fresh, clean water must be available at all times.

For the first 6 weeks of age, a 20% protein starter mash should be offered, which can be gradually changed to a 16% protein formula after 8 weeks of age. Feed should be provided to newly hatched chicks on a large, flat plate. Shallow bowls should be used for water, as small chicks may drown in large water containers. Stones or glass marbles may be placed in the water container to reduce depth.

RESTRAINT

The face and eyes of handlers should be protected from possible injury from spurs (cocks) or beaks. A hooked long stick can be used to gently catch chickens in an aviary. The legs of chickens should be restrained first and then the abdomen supported from below. A large bird can be restrained by placing it under one arm and pressing it gently against one's body. Birds can be calmed by placing a loose-fitting lightweight cotton sock over the head to reduce vision. Some chickens may go into a "hypnotic" state for noninvasive procedures by having their head placed under a wing and rocking them side to side.

Chickens that are housed exclusively outdoors may become overheated during the trip to the veterinary clinic and subsequent examination. If the chicken appears agitated and begins panting, the examination should be suspended until the panting stops. Midazolam (0.5 mg/kg IM) may alleviate anxiety and struggling, thereby decreasing the potential for overheating.

GROOMING

Beak trimming is not recommended in pet chickens. Owners of pet roosters may request veterinarians to blunt the tips of the spurs, which can be performed with a Dremel tool. An appropriate mask and face protection should be worn to prevent inhalation of dust. Trimming of the flight feathers may be performed to prevent birds from escaping from open aviaries or to reduce the mobility of an aggressive cock during the breeding period. A sufficient amount of wing feathers should remain to prevent damage to the keel if the bird should try to fly.

MOST COMMON DISORDERS

- Viral, bacterial, mycoplasmal, parasitic, chlamydial, rickettsial and fungal agents
- Internal and external parasites
- Geriatric chickens develop atherosclerosis, cardiomyopathy, arthritis, gout, obesity and renal disease
- Reproductive system diseases including chronic infections and neoplasia



For additional veterinary information go to www.Harrisonsbirdfoods.com/chickens