

Keeping Chickens Newsletter

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April 2011
Vol.2

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

Graham : I got an old UPC window frame with the glass in. Made a brick frame for it to lay on flat but a slight raise at one end for drainage and ensured a all year round dry dust bath for girls and boys. They love it snow rain wind the dust is always dry. Looks like a bomb site under the frame as the craters they lay in get bigger. Use the old ash from our wood fire as a top up. Lads use it perhaps every other day (dirty boys) girls each day as they powder the nose or beak as ladies do. As always enjoy the site. Keep well Graham

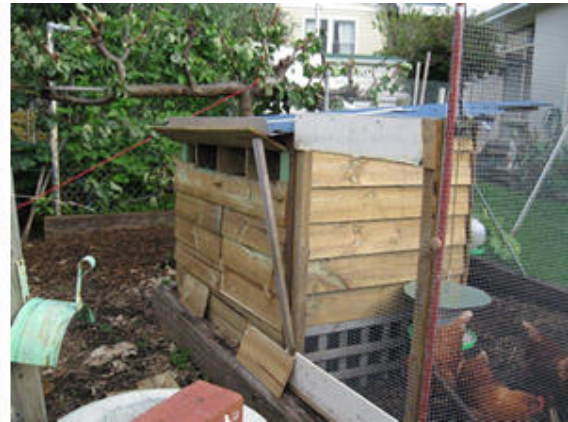
Pam : It's sad to say but we have recently been "found out" by a predator! They first began stealing the eggs while the girls slept in the roost above inside the coop but the gals got wise and began to fight back. Very quickly, one cold morning at the break of dawn a fight occurred and before we could get out the back door "it" had sliced the throat of feisty Reba the Rhode Island Red. After her funeral in the veggie compost bed, we took all precautions to protect the rest of the girls. We collected eggs every two hours, sealed all area we thought the intruder could use but Alas...last Thursday night at 11pm we hear a commotion and all run armed with flashlights, guns and nerves of steal. The culprit gets away unseen but I find Sweet Loretta our sweetest most lovable Black Sex link running down our driveway. She jumps into my arms terrified. The next day, she seems fine but the next morning we find her. It looks as though she simply fell asleep on the roost, died and slipped off to lay on the coop floor. Another Funeral, another inventory, health check, security check, solar garden lights installed all around and we wait. No signs of fur or paw prints and the one small place we found has to be a somewhat small critter. I'm leaning toward a possum. I shot one Dec 25th in there chowing down on eggs. We've blocked every access we can find. Hoping to get a small animal trap from my brother in Law this weekend and try to catch it. We moved the coop again (portable) so hopefully that will help.



Two pictures included : Reba pecking next to her "sisters" and Loretta dancing up and down the perching roost in the run. You could sing "Coal Miner's Daughter" and she'd parade up and down the perch.



John Thomson : G'day Gina. I wrote a few years ago and showed my chook tractor complete with 2 x Isa Browns. Time has moved on and so have those chooks. We now have 4 x Hy-Lines which are apparently the next generation of Isa Browns. These birds were rescued as young pullets from a local egg factory. They have taken to freedom with a real zest for life and now lay 4 eggs a day. I have attached pictures of the hen house and the nest boxes.



Come summer the girls are given the freedom of the greater garden with out-of-bounds areas netted off. Regards John Thomson, Tasmania, Australia



200 Eggs a Year

Chicken Care Guide

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Danuta Stachowiak : Hi Gina - I so enjoy your news letter (keep it coming!) I'm sending you few pictures that you & others might find interesting or amusing. One is of our 4 girls (great egg layers even though all four are very young). They are also very smart & ingenious (do you see that hole in our lawn - they did it!) sometimes all 4 get into it & all you see is 4 heads!



Everything new done in our yard has to be inspected & approved or disapproved by them! Now most chickens I know about, do like (or at least do not mind) having fake eggs placed in the nests to give them an idea of what is expected of them. My chickens go into a tizzy about it & roll the fake eggs all the way out of the nest, or even out of the coop!! Also as each lays her egg after announcing it for all to know, she also demands a special treat & we better not forget it!! One picture shows my son Jim giving them some “mealworms” soon after all of them presented us with an egg.



Sometimes we can't keep up with eating all the eggs, so occasionally I will pickle a bunch, they go so well on salads or just as is (best when you make them with some hot peppers!) With all the rains we had in March & now with our famous hot California Summer on its way, I decided to give the girls some additional protection from both. My boys helped me to install a lovely pavilion right over the coop & believe me the girls supervised the whole thing (getting under our feet etc.)



Once it was finished they strutted around it with pride (one of my dogs went to inspect it, & soon found out that was not a safe thing to do! We really enjoy all our critters, 4 dogs, 3 cats & the girls, & most of the time they all get along just fine as long as they respect each others space & food. It's like a circus just watching them all!

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Lisa : Hi Gina, Thanks for the fun newsletters! I just wanted to share with others some of my experiences with chickens...so they don't have the same problems I have had. I was impatient to get started with chickens when we first moved to our new home. Instead of ordering chicks and starting out slow, I found chickens for sale on Craigslist. Some of them were healthy, but older hens, that still lay an egg or two each week. But the rest of the Craigslist chickens have brought along two different diseases, Mareks and Chronic Respiratory disease. Mareks disease is a virus that is present in feathers and dander and, from what I have read, it takes 3 years in a poultry free environment to get rid of it. I can have future chicks vaccinated against it, but that is not 100 percent effective. So we will have to live with that. The Chronic Respiratory disease is a bacteria that you can treat with antibiotics, but anytime the chickens are under physical stress, they can come back down with the symptoms. I treated them with a tetracycline based antibiotic first and the symptoms were back within days. I waited a while and treated with an erythromycin based antibiotic and that was effective in eliminating most of the symptoms in all but one chicken. She seemed very sickly and I put her down to prevent re-infecting the rest of the flock. The only way to completely get rid of the Chronic Respiratory disease would be to cull the entire flock and sanitize, then start over. I have decided to keep these chickens as long as they seem healthy and happy, and are laying eggs. In the meantime, I will not share hatching eggs or chickens with anyone else so that I will not pass the disease along to another flock.

Please let people know that if they have chickens that are sick, they should not give them away or sell them to someone else and pass along a disease. I wish that I had never gotten those sick chickens...many diseases don't show up right away, and I didn't know that these chickens were sick until it was too late. Thanks! Lisa





Cathy : Thanks so much for your newsletter! I look forward to it twice a month now, and I am always interested to hear how others are enjoying their chickens! We moved to the countryside a year ago, and within a few months we had our first 3 "hens". We bought them when they were about 4 weeks old, and within a few weeks we thought we were going to lose them to coccidiosis. They recovered well from that, and a few months later one of our hens started crowing! "Shakira" became "Rocky", and turned out to be a beautiful Cuckoo Maran cockeral. A little while later we introduced "Rhoda" to our little flock, so we now have 3 hens and a rooster. My question is about some trouble we are having with "Rocky". He has become quite possessive of his girls, and has attacked my 6-year-old daughter twice.





The chickens used to have free range of the yard, but since he has gotten aggressive we have built a 4-foot fence around a large area of the yard and also clipped his wings. Imagine how deflated I was, when the fence was finally finished and his wings clipped, to see him mount the top of the fence and crow indignantly!! I have enclosed some pictures so you can see for yourself. My daughter used to pose no threat to him, she could play freely and get down beside them without him bothering her. I thought that he would remain quite comfortable with her since we got him so young (in fact, she chose him herself, so she feels quite betrayed!), and she used to help me feed them. Anyway, I was wondering if anyone has any ideas about how to keep Rocky inside the fence? I know I could re-home him, and I am not completely opposed to that, but I would prefer to keep him if we could make sure that he is not a threat to any children.

My Reply : A 6 foot high fence should in theory be high enough to be a deterrent to flying out so an extra couple of feet may help although there are no guarantees as many breeds can physically fly higher if they want to (especially the smaller ones). Chickens will sometimes roost in trees if nearby so if he wanted to sit on the fence he probably still could even if it was a little higher. I don't know how to keep him inside the fence for definite other than by completely covering the whole area. Perhaps someone reading this will have a good solution ☺ If you do decide to keep him then in theory if you can establish yourself as above him in the pecking order his anti-social behaviour should stop. Roosters can cause injuries (particularly with their spurs) so a degree of wariness is necessary and children in particular should not approach an aggressive rooster or attempt any dominance exercises (at least not without adult supervision). One common way to gain dominance over a roo is to pick him up. In a past newsletter Brenda said "My huge buff orpington rooster became overly aggressive. He would attack any visitors, as well as myself on occasion. Standing up to him did no good because he wouldn't back down. So I did as my grandfather had shown me years ago. I caught him, and while holding him in one arm, reached over with my other hand and covered his face, and eyes. While doing this, I also forced his head down. I held him like this for about 3

minutes. That was 2 months ago, and he hasn't even attempted an attack since." *You could also try being armed with a spray bottle of water ready for any charges or pecking attacks - sometimes a few squirts with a water gun does do the trick (a broom is another alternative!).*



Colin : Many thanks for this interesting news letter, I have certainly learnt a lot. Last month there was a 3 inch egg (with another egg inside). I have also had a 3 inch egg (see photo attached) however I was fortunate enough not to have another egg inside it. It certainly made a delicious fried egg. Colin Reith (Caerphilly, UK)

Chicken Coop Plans

A Collection Of 7 Printable Chicken Coop Plans



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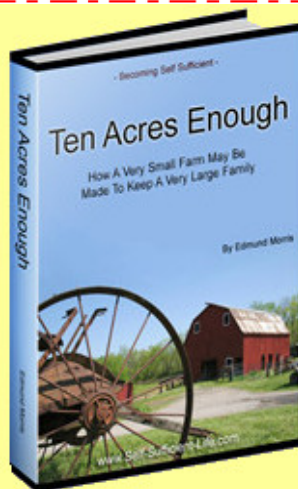
Terry : I've just started to receive your newsletter and have already gleaned some new info from it, thanks! I got my first small flock of chickens last September and I can't believe how much personality they have, not to mention how attached I've become! What great pets. My cat Slinky has adopted them too. She hangs with her 'peeps' for a portion of every day. When we first got them she wouldn't leave them at all. I had to take her out of the coop to close the door at night! She even brings them an occasional mouse or vole 'treat'. Gross, but well meaning. I've sent two photos. The first one is Slinky 'chatting' with the girls.



The second photo shows Slinky keeping Tappy company in the nest box until Tappy is done with her business. Since I started letting the chickens free-range Slinky follows them around the property, keeping an eye on them. She'll get up and move with them, sometimes for hours, until she finally goes off to do 'cat things'.

This spring I am hoping to let one of my hens hatch out a batch of chicks. I'm not so sure that Slinky will be able to resist being a natural born predator around cute, tiny chicks. I'm thinking that I will have to keep them in an enclosure until the chicks are big enough to fend for themselves. I was thinking of a wire, roofed enclosure within the coop. How big should it be so Mama has room to stretch her legs? I just hate to keep them caged up instead of running with Mom through the grass. I would love some suggestions from the people more experienced in this situation. I won't be able to build anything elaborate, like a chicken tractor - I just want to work with what I already have. Thanks for any ideas...And thanks again for a great newsletter. I like reading about other people's experiences. Terry

My Reply : You will need a hen to go broody so assuming one does then making a partition in your existing coop is one common way of allowing a broody hen and her chicks to grow whilst having a bit of protection from other members of the flock (or Slinky). The usual recommended amount of floor space is at least 2 square feet per adult bird of coop space and obviously the chicks will need to be accounted for as well – especially considering the rate at which they will grow.



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; how he selected the land, what he chose to grow, the animals he raised, planning and managing his fully stocked kitchen garden and the layout of his fields. He also passes along many tips for planting and growing his selection of fruits and vegetables as well as sharing his experiences with cows, pigs and chickens. He explains honestly what worked for him and what did not.

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Steve : Thanks for sending me your newsletter. As a "new-be" to the chicken raising world, it's come in handy. I wanted to send you pictures of my coop (chicken tractor) that I built last summer. It's 4ftx8ft and 6-8ft tall. Since it's mobile, I had to run 2 wires side by side along the outside to accommodate the solar electric fencer. Also, I put ¼" hardware cloth around the bottom 2ft to help with predators. You'll notice that the entire side of the coop is a door. It takes some heavy hinges to do this, but it's easy access. I have to tie it open when I'm cleaning it (or if you can talk your son into cleaning it) or the wind will take it and slam it shut.





The blue birdhouse top is above the water bowl to keep the chickens from using it as a bathroom. In the winter, that rubber bowl is exchanged for a heated dog water dish to keep it from freezing. I also have a light on a timer for summer-like days in the winter. Thanks, Steve

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