

# How to Take Care of Chickens at Home

By Eleanor Jewell, eHow Contributor



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*Even if you do not live on a farm, you can raise chickens. In fact, chickens make interesting pets. Unlike other pets that require constant attention, chickens require little maintenance. Daily feedings and fresh bowls of water are all chickens really need, aside from safe living quarters. Once you set up the coop, the chickens will pretty much take care of themselves. Taking care of chickens at [home](#) is a rewarding experience that can yield great tasting and chemical-free, farm-fresh eggs.*

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## Things You'll Need

- Chicken coop
- Diatomaceous earth
- Lime
- Wood shavings, nesting boxes, straw, feeder, protein chicken starter food, protein grower food, layer crumbles, heavy bowls, water, bleach, spray bottle, food scraps, golf balls, plastic sheeting or tarp.

## Instructions

- **1** Provide the chickens with an appropriate-sized coop. Each chicken will require at least 2 to 4 square feet of floor space. So, if you have four chickens, an 8-by-8-foot coop should suffice.
- **2** Sprinkle diatomaceous earth on the floor of the coop to reduce pest infestations. Mix lime in with the diatomaceous earth to neutralize odors. Add equal parts of diatomaceous earth and lime to a [flour](#) sifter for an even sprinkling on the floor of the coop. A light dusting, less than 1/2 inch, is all that is necessary.
- **3** Cover the lime and diatomaceous earth with a 3- to 4-inch layer of wood shavings in [winter](#), and a 1- to 2-inch layer in the summer. Remove old wood shavings and replace them with fresh shavings at least twice a year. One thorough cleaning in the spring and once again in the fall should suffice.
- **4** Supply the chickens with nesting boxes inside the coop. Provide one nesting box per hen, layering the bottom of each nesting box with straw. Nesting boxes look like small cubbies that are only large enough to fit one hen comfortably. A 12-by-12-by-12-inch nesting box is large enough for a hen to stand in and turn around.
- **5** Feed the chickens a diet of protein chick starter in a feeder for the first eight weeks of life, switching to a protein grower food for the following eight weeks. Feed the chickens layer crumbles when they reach 16 weeks old. Layer crumbles have a combination of protein and amino acids that encourage healthy growth. Place the feeder inside the coop in the winter and [outdoors](#) in the summer.
- **6** Provide the chickens with plenty of fresh water. Use heavy bowls that the chickens cannot tip over. Supply fresh water in the morning and in the evening, inside the coop in the winter and outdoors in the summer. Adult chickens require 1 to 2 cups of water per day.

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- [Raising Chickens 101www.Agriculture.com](#)
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## Tips & Warnings

- Sanitize the feeder and water bowls weekly. Fill a spray bottle with a solution of 10 percent bleach to 90 percent water. Empty the feeder and bowls, rinse with water, spray them down with the bleach solution, and allow it to sit on the surface for 10 minutes before giving a final rinse. Air-dry the bowls and feeder.
  - Add supplemental food scraps to the chickens' diet at the age of 16 weeks. This can include leftovers from the dinner table, and fruits and vegetables. A calcium supplement, such as oyster shells or ground bone, is also recommended, along with chicken scratch or grit combined in a feeder.
  - Nestle one or two golf balls in the straw of each nesting box. Since golf balls resemble eggs, the practice will prompt the chickens to lay their eggs in the nesting box.
  - Cover the coop in plastic during the winter to keep the chickens warm inside. Close the door of coop during winter evenings, opening it again in the morning.
  - Do not forget to open the coop door every morning in the winter. Chickens need at least 12 hours of sunlight per day. Keeping them confined inside the coop will deny them the required light.
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