

Western Wards Allotment Association

Advice and Application to Keep Hens

Advice for Keeping Hens on WWAA Sites

Under the 1950 Allotment Act, the keeping of hens is permitted on allotments and viewed as an allotment holder's right, so long as they are for the tenant's own use and not for business or profit.

If any animal on an allotment is deemed a nuisance, health hazard or their well-being is affected then they can be removed. All livestock is subject to strict welfare codes enforced by the RSPCA and DEFRA and covered by the Animal Welfare Act. The Act states that all animals have basic needs that must be fulfilled by their owner or keeper. If you are found guilty of neglect of an animal in your care by causing unnecessary suffering or failing to provide a suitable diet or living conditions then you may be evicted from your plot, be reported to the police and potentially have to serve a prison sentence.

Click on the link to download a leaflet produced by the RSPCA [Welfare of animals on allotments](#). This guidance contains information about the specific needs of different species. [Click here](#) to view the NAS leaflet about Hens and Rabbits on plots.

Hens

- When referring to hens, the law means the female of the species and excludes cockerels. Often cockerels are covered by local by-laws, excluding them from allotments because of the noise they make – if you are in any doubt, please seek guidance from your site manager.
- We recommend any tenant who is considering keeping hens, keeps no more than is needed for their own personal use. As a guide, a point-of-lay hen might lay up to five eggs in any week, so the average family would require no more than 2 or 3 hens.
- DEFRA regulations stipulate that any flock of 50 hens or above must be registered with them. However please remember hens cannot be kept for commercial gain.
- Further information on keeping hens, including the ideal size of perch, house and scratching land, can be found at the British Hen Welfare Trust www.bhwt.org.uk

Water

Chickens must always have access to clean and fresh water. In cold weather, care should be taken to prevent drinking water from icing-up. Should this occur, the ice should be broken manually; chemicals that prevent the build-up of ice or break it up once formed should never be used. Drinkers should be cleaned regularly, and water should not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition. Drinkers that prevent young chicks climbing in and drowning should be used. As the birds become older and require more water, alternative drinkers can be introduced, and those drinkers used previously should be removed gradually over several days. If new chickens are introduced to the allotment, they must be provided with facilities to which they are already accustomed, as chickens do not like to drink from unfamiliar drinkers.

Food

Chickens will spend much of their day scratching and foraging for small seeds, roots, and insects. However, they will need additional food, which is suitable for their age and breed, to provide a balanced diet. If feed is provided outside, it should be sheltered to keep it clean and dry. Feed dispensers should be cleaned regularly, and precautions taken to prevent infestation and contamination of the feed. Avoid attracting rodents and wild birds by, for example, cleaning up any spilt feed. Chickens must also always have access to insoluble grit (e.g. hard flint grit) to aid digestion. If the birds are kept on a grassed area, the grass should not be allowed to become too long, as, if eaten, long strands can become impacted in the crop, making it difficult for the birds to digest food.

Laying Hens

As female birds (hens) mature they will begin to lay eggs and a layers' mash, or pellet feed should be provided to ensure a balanced diet. Calcium supplements, such as oyster shell, can also be included in the diet. Hens will naturally prefer to find a quiet, secluded place to lay their eggs. Therefore, hens should be provided with individual, enclosed nest boxes. The boxes should be draught-free and lined with plenty of clean, dry and comfortable nesting material, such as straw or wood shavings.

Housing

Chickens should be provided with warm, dry and well-ventilated housing. Adequate ventilation is very important, and while it is important to keep the birds warm, there must also be good air circulation inside the housing. The floor should be covered with a suitable substrate, such as wood shavings or straw, which must be kept dry and friable and therefore topped-up or replaced when necessary. Chickens like to dustbathe and preen their feathers, therefore a suitable material, such as wood shavings, should also be supplied for this activity. Feed and water facilities should be provided within the house. Owners must ensure that there is plenty of space for the birds to move around easily and perform their natural behaviours within the house, this will depend on the

size and number of chickens and the layout of facilities. It is important not to overstock birds as doing so may increase aggression and the potential for conflict. Chickens will naturally seek a raised position to roost at dusk, which is an anti-predator behaviour, and should therefore be provided with perching facilities. Perches should be wooden and approximately 3-5cm in width with rounded edges, to enable the birds to grip them properly. They should provide enough perching space for all the chickens to roost at the same time. However, there must be enough space either side of the perch for hens to get up and down from them without injuring themselves. As a guide, chickens may require about 15cm of perching space each, but this will depend on the size of the birds. The height of the perches will have to be adjusted according to the age, size and breed of birds being kept. In smaller houses, a greater proportion of birds tend to go out onto the range area during the day, and only use the housing at night. The entrance to the housing should be wide enough to allow chickens to pass through without difficulty and high enough so that they do not have to crouch down. The accommodation should be cleaned out frequently and disinfected to ensure that there are no harmful parasites that could compromise the birds' health.

Pasture

The outdoor area will require careful management and should be given periods of rest, to allow the ground and grass to recover. It is important that the area is sufficiently large enough to be divided (unless there are alternative grass areas nearby to use) to allow the chickens to roam on good pasture every day while other parts are allowed to recover. Again, the birds should have plenty of space to move around easily and perform their natural behaviours, this will depend on the size and number of chickens and the layout of facilities. Overhead cover should be provided on the range area such as small trees, shrubs and purpose-built shelters, to provide the chickens with protection from the sun, bad weather and other animals. It will also help to encourage birds to utilise the full outside area. They should also have access to dry soil where they can dustbathe and forage. Where outside conditions and/or the vegetation is poor or limited, consideration should be given to providing alternative areas for enrichment. The provision of straw will keep birds occupied and encourage them to carry out food searching behaviours. Raised perches on the range area should be considered, as they provide a way for individuals to escape from one another, and birds often use them as a place to preen during the day.

Fencing

Fences should be well maintained and provide appropriate protection against other animals. The design should ensure that the birds cannot escape or become trapped or injured.

Company

We recommend that people keep at least three hens (female chickens) which get on well together. Cockerels (male chickens) should not be kept together, unless they have grown up together and get on well.

Introducing new stock to an existing flock

Mixing of chickens that are unfamiliar with each other should be done carefully. Avoid mixing breeds with substantially different body weights or individuals from the same breed of markedly different sizes as this may result in increased conflict and bullying of smaller birds.

Health

Signs of poor health may include a hunched posture, erect feathers, and a reluctance to move. Birds may also be found hiding, for example in corners or amongst housing equipment, and may tuck their head under their wing. Healthy birds appear alert and interested in their environment and look 'bright eyed' and well hydrated. Chickens can be susceptible to lice and red mites. Lice, which are 2-3mm in size, can be found all over the body with their eggs being deposited around the shaft of the feather. Red mites are smaller and are more likely to be found on the fixtures within the shed. However, where a more serious infestation exists, they may be seen on birds at the base of the feathers, particularly under the wing.

Worming

Poultry need regular worming, particularly if they are kept on the same ground for a prolonged period (more than a month).

Feather pecking

Feather pecking is where hens peck and pull at the feathers of other hens, sometimes leading to more serious injuries and even cannibalism. It can affect hens in any system, including commercial farming systems and hens kept as pets. Healthy hens, with plenty of space, dust-bathing facilities and opportunity to scratch and forage are less at risk but outbreaks can suddenly occur. More information can be found in the 'Laying hen feather cover advice guide' which can be downloaded from the RSPCA website.

APPLICATION TO KEEP HENS

Please read section 12 of the Tenancy Agreement before submitting your application to keep hens (no cockerels allowed).

You will need to provide a plan of the hen house and run with measurements and the number of birds you intend to keep, to your site manager who will ensure that no neighbouring plot holders have any objections.

The coop should be two metres in height, allowing a minimum of one square metre floor area per bird. This run should include perches, room for a dust bath and adequate shelter from sun, wind, and rain, which is in addition to the hen house. Chicken feed should be stored in a metal container.

Please submit a plan with measurements of the hen house and run to your site manager and complete the application form.

Once your application is approved and signed, you will be able to construct your coop.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SITE:

PLOT NO:

SIGNED:

DATE:

By signing this form, you agree that you have read and understood the information and guidance below from page 3 onwards, and to care for your chickens in-line with that guidance

APPROVED BY

SITE MANAGER

SIGNED

DATE:

Please retain this part with your tenancy agreement.

THIS PART TO BE RETAINED BY WWAA

APPLICATION TO KEEP HENS

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SITE:

PLOT NO:

SIGNED:

DATE:

By signing this form, you agree that you have read and understood the information and guidance below from page 3 onwards, and to care for your chickens in-line with that guidance.

PROPOSED PLAN OF COOP RECEIVED AND APPROVED BY:

SITE MANAGER:

SIGNED:

DATE:

Site managers should ensure that neighbouring plot holders have no objections.

Plans of hen coop to be kept with application.