

CHICKENS IN THE CITY

The Quest for Fresh Eggs

By Angela Knipple

Why chickens? As new urban chicken-keepers, we are often asked that question. For us, there are many answers. We love fresh eggs (and can tell the difference). Baby chickens are the cutest little puffballs. Chickens have plenty of personality and make good outdoor pets. There's great fertilizer for the garden. And then, for me, there's the nostalgia factor.

I got my first chickens when I was five. Like our girls, these started out as urban chickens. My grandfather was planning to move out of the city, so he started his chicken flock before the move with four hens and two roosters that he bought at the farm supply as hatchlings. I fell in love from the moment he brought them home. Of course, at first only my grandfather could tell which ones were the roosters. To me, they were just adorable, chirpy little puffs. I always had one of them with me whenever I was at home. Those first weeks when they were living in a box in the laundry room were absolute bliss for me. My Barbies were sadly neglected as chickens started wearing their clothes and riding the elevator in their dream house.

When we moved to the country and had a coop set up outside for them, things changed a bit. My babies started growing up fast and decided that they didn't really care much for being carried around in sweaty little-girl hands. I still spent every bit of time with them that I could. It was my job to collect eggs every day, my first real responsibility at home. And soon enough, our little flock began to grow as our hens grew broody and began incubating their eggs. I counted every day that a hen was sitting, and I'm sure that I annoyed them horribly by checking under their wings for new babies.

Unlike at our house now, my grandfather kept chickens for more than eggs. Quite a few of those chickens "went to live with other families" while I was at school. As a child, I never associated the missing chickens with the wonderful fried chicken we had for supper. I just trusted what my grandfather told me and knew that our chickens were happy wherever they were living. And there were always new babies to fill my little heart with chicken love.

As adorable as all those babies were, there were some chickens who were special pets with personalities that keep them alive in my memory. There was Dominecker, a large Dominique hen and the queen of the coop. She was the first chicken awake every morning, the first to touch her morning feed and the first into the yard. All of her babies were boys, and they all inherited her personality. Oddly enough, they always seemed to "find new homes" as soon as they hit rooster adulthood.

There was Huebert, the very large (to my six-year-old self) rooster who was the king and patriarch of our first little flock. He only liked my grandmother and was very protective of her, even greeting her at her car every evening when she got home. My grandfather had warned me that roosters might be cute in Barbie clothes, but that they would grow up and remember that they don't like you very much. Huebert proved him right. There were plenty of days when he would see me in the yard, drop his wings, lower his head and start weaving toward me. I'm sure that if he had been a serious threat, he wouldn't have stayed in the yard for long, but I never gave him the chance to get close enough to find out when he was in that mood.

And then there was Henrietta, my Rhode Island Red. Arguably, the rest of the chickens belonged to my grandfather, but Henrietta was all mine. She was one of the few chickens who came into our flock as an adult. My great-uncle had a large flock of Rhode Island Reds and Delawares on his farm. I spent hours chasing those chickens who weren't as well-versed in the ways of little girls as my grandfather's flock. Finally, my great-uncle told me that if I could catch one of his chickens, I could have her. One of the hens was no longer young, so she may have been moving quite a bit slower than the rest. Whatever it was, I caught her. I named her Henrietta before we left, and she was never away from me after that, if I could help it. And, yes, a determined little girl can sneak a chicken into her bed.

Sadly, Henrietta went the way of old hens, and as my grandfather's health declined, the flock shrank and finally disappeared. I grew up and found myself too busy or just not living in the right place to have chickens. I had pretty much resigned myself to having them only in happy memories. But then last year, we saw the birth of the Memphis Farmers' Market. As the diversity of products available grew, I found myself craving farm fresh eggs—the one thing it seemed I couldn't find at the market. So I decided to take matters into my own hands and started researching the growing number of urban chicken flocks.

After months of reading and researching and checking and rechecking city ordinances, we took a family vote and decided to increase our family by eight. While I knew that at least one of our girls would have to be a Rhode Island Red, we researched heritage chicken breeds to decide on the rest. We planned out their enclosed run and their coop, and then we placed our order for our baby girls. As the day of their arrival approached, we prepared a warm place for them in our laundry room. And then the mailman finally delivered them—eight beautiful little chirping fluffs.

Right: Della, the Delaware, struts her stuff.





Young Angela with her beloved Henrietta.

They've grown quickly, and each one of them has shown her own personality. Della, our Delaware, is named after my grandmother, Huebert's friend. She is the leader of the pack. Marsala, our Ameraucanus, is our shy beauty queen. Karen, our Silver Gray Dorking, is a lovable klutz. Satay, our Rhode Island Red, is brave and curious about everything. Kiev, our Red Star, is very determined to be a house chicken and loves our company. Dumpling, our Australorp, likes to snuggle on our shoulders. Fricassee, our Dominique, likes to peck fingers and is the best fly catcher of the flock. And then there's Sam, our Golden Wyandotte, who's always perfectly well-mannered and ladylike. All of our ladies are very loved, despite having parents who named most of them after chicken dishes.

While we've still got a few months to go until they'll provide us with enough fresh eggs to keep us well-fed and to share with family and friends, the family memories of raising them are something that I know will stay with my son for the rest of his life. These quirky birds have won our hearts and brought me back to my childhood. They also provide an invaluable connection with the sources of our food and give us even more appreciation for where it all comes from. So, why chickens? Why not?

Chicken Resources

Halls Feed and Seed
155 US Highway 72 E
Collierville, TN 38017
901-854-5739

Hollywood Pet Star
2648 Broad Ave
Memphis, TN 38112
901-452-2474

www.mypetchicken.com

www.ideal-poultry.com

www.wikihow.com/Keep-Chickens-in-a-City

Angela Knipple lives in midtown Memphis with her husband, son and a motley crew of cats, turtles and chickens. When she's not having fun at home, she and her family travel and eat wherever they end up. You can find out more about the Knipple family's adventures in and out of the kitchen online at <http://squirrel-squad.blogspot.com>.

Raising Chickens in Memphis

by Paul Knipple

Before purchasing chickens, it is essential to ensure that they are legal to have in your area. Chickens are legal in Memphis and in unincorporated Shelby County as long as they are kept in a coop and do not constitute a "nuisance" like a crowing rooster or odors from poorly cleaned coops. For other municipalities, be sure to check with your local animal services department in advance. It is also important to research breeds that are appropriate for your climate and available space and for the egg output you want.

Newly hatched chicks can be purchased locally or online in spring and early summer. Purchasing locally saves on shipping and allows for personal advice from the seller. Purchasing online allows for a wider selection of breeds. Most sites selling chicks online have excellent breed advice and allow you to choose the gender of your chicks. Online sellers do have minimum purchase quantities; however, these are usually low. Chicks typically cost \$2 – \$5, with hens being more expensive than roosters. Chicks may only be shipped on the day they hatch within a 2-day radius from the hatchery. Expect a 4- to 6-week delay from your order date until your chicks arrive.

Chickens are social. You should have at least two, but no more than one rooster. Roosters will fight, risking injury to each other and to your hens. Unless you plan on breeding your chickens, it is best to buy only hens, as they don't need roosters to lay eggs.

Before the chicks arrive, have ready a waterer, a feeder and food that is specially designed for chicks. A local specialty pet store or feed store can help you with the feed. Also, find a veterinarian who handles poultry. That way there is no last-minute search should one of your animals become injured or ill.

Very young chicks must be kept indoors with controlled temperatures. A large cardboard box providing 2 to 4 square feet per chick will suffice as an initial enclosure. A layer of shredded newspaper covered by a sheet of mesh is a good bedding for them. Replace the newspaper frequently. The mesh gives the chicks good traction for their fast-growing legs. Chickens need a constant supply of food and water. Their water container will get messy and should be cleaned out frequently. They will be ready to move outside at 6 weeks. However, at 3 weeks, they are ready to fly. A sheet of chicken wire clamped to the top of the box will keep the little ones from escaping. Also, be sure to protect your chicks from other household pets, especially dogs.

The chicks require warm conditions, so provide them with a heat lamp. The lamp should be high enough above the chicks to

prevent curious little ones from pecking at the bulb. Monitor the chicks' behavior for indications of their comfort. If they are huddled closely together under the heat lamp, they are too cold. If they behave this way consistently, look at increasing the temperature in their space.

The outdoor space for the chickens should include an enclosed coop and a protected run. The coop gives the chickens a safe place to lay their eggs and to sleep at night. It should provide good airflow, but should also be insulated enough to keep the chickens warm in the winter. In the case of extremely cold temperatures, a heat lamp can keep the chickens safe and comfortable. For their safety, the chickens should be kept in the coop at night behind a latched door. The hens need clean straw for bedding material that should be replaced frequently. The run should be enclosed on the sides and the top to keep out predators. At least one corner of the run should be covered to give the chickens shade and to keep rain out of their food. Wet food should be replaced promptly.

Hens will begin to lay eggs when they are 4 to 5 months old. On average, a hen will lay an egg every one and a half days. The coop should be checked daily for new eggs. Freshly laid eggs have a natural coating that keeps them from spoiling and, if unwashed, can be kept out of the refrigerator for up to 7 days. If the eggs are washed or if they are to be kept longer than 7 days, they must be refrigerated.



Egg Fettuccine alla Carbonara

For the pasta:

8 egg yolks (to equal $\frac{7}{8}$ cup of yolks)
2 Tbsp water
1 Tbsp olive oil
3 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup semolina flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

Mix all ingredients until thoroughly combined.

Knead for five minutes and then divide into 8 equal portions. Wrap tightly and let dough rest for at least 30 minutes.

Roll out dough very thin and cut into noodles. Keep noodles separated until ready to cook to prevent clumping.

Cook for about 6 minutes in 6 quarts of boiling salted water.

For the sauce:

6 oz. thick-cut bacon, diced
1 medium onion, finely chopped
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine
3 eggs
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Parmigiana-Reggiano, shredded
1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

Cook bacon in heavy skillet over medium heat until fat begins to render.

Add onion and cook until onion is slightly golden, about 10 minutes.

Add wine and boil until reduced by half, 1 to 2 minutes.

While pasta is cooking, whisk together eggs, cheese, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Set aside.

Add drained pasta to skillet and toss with tongs until pasta is thoroughly coated.

Remove from heat and add egg mixture, tossing to combine. Serve immediately.

Karen, the Silver Gray Dorking prefers hiding in the bushes to being photographed.