



Keeping Backyard Chickens in the Cariboo Regional District

building communities together



@CaribooRD

cariboord.ca

facebook.com/caribooregion



Phone 250-392-3351 or 1-800-665-1636 Suite D, 180 North 3rd Avenue, Williams Lake, BC V2G 2A4



Keeping Backyard Chickens in the Cariboo Regional District

In recent years, many communities in British Columbia and across North America have adopted bylaws to enable property owners to produce some of their own food, promote local food security and engage future generations in the process of food production. To support residents who are interested in producing their own food, the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) now permits residents to keep backyard chickens on residentially zoned single family properties that are not traditionally zoned for agricultural uses. The bylaw amendments were passed on June 6, 2014.

This guide has been created to provide you with the information you need to determine whether keeping backyard chickens is appropriate for your lifestyle and property, as well as things to consider.

What properties are allowed to have chickens?

In addition to rural zoned properties which have always been permitted to raise chickens, any property zoned R1, R2, RS, RS1, RS2, RL, or RL2 and institutional or commercial uses are now permitted to have

chickens. Properties with multi-family dwellings (three or more homes) and mobile home parks are not permitted to have chickens.

If you are unsure of the zoning of your property, you can find this information by searching on the CRD website or checking with CRD planning staff.

How many chickens are allowed on my property?

Properties with less than an acre (0.4 hectare) of land are permitted a maximum of 4 hens.

Properties with 0.99 acre - 1.98 acres (0.4 - 0.8 hectare) are permitted a maximum of 10 hens and one rooster.

Properties with greater than 1.98 acres (0.8 hectare) are permitted a maximum of 20 hens and two roosters.

A maximum of one rooster per 10 hens is permitted on any property greater than 0.4 hectare (0.99 acre).

These restrictions do not apply to properties located within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) or to properties which are otherwise zoned to allow for agricultural operations. Keeping hens is only permitted ancillary to a residential use. This means that hens can only be kept on a property where there is an occupied dwelling.





What does the CRD require me to provide for my chickens?

Owners must house their hens within a chicken coop, and provide them with access to a secure outdoor run. Each enclosure or structure must be maintained in good repair and sanitary condition and in a manner that prevents entrance to the enclosure by other animals. On properties with less than 0.4 hectare (0.99 acre), all hens must be completely enclosed within either the run or coop at all times, and they must not be able to escape the property.

What size must the coop be and where can it be located?

A coop must provide a minimum of 0.37 square metres (3.99 square feet) of floor area per hen, with the maximum floor area not exceeding 9.2 square metres (99 square feet). The maximum height permitted for a coop or run is three metres (9.8 feet) and hens must have access to a secure outdoor run with a minimum floor area of 0.92 square metres (9.9 square feet) per hen. The floor of the run can be any combination of vegetation or bare earth.

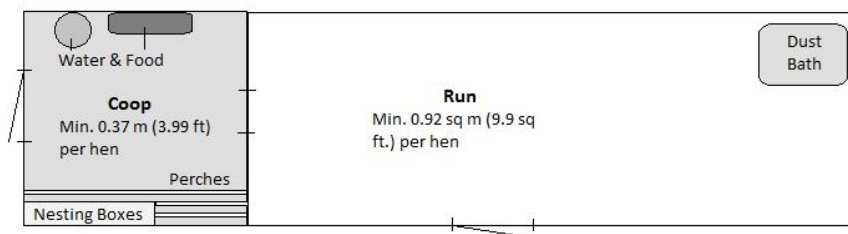


Figure 1. A simple coop example

The coop must be located to the rear or side of the residence a minimum of three metres (9.8 feet) from any dwelling or property line. If the property is a corner lot, the coop must be placed to the rear of the residential dwelling, with a minimum setback of 4.5 metres (14.8 feet) from the exterior property line, and be screened from the adjacent highway or road to the side.

To minimize the potential for dangerous wildlife conflicts, the bylaw also stipulates that the coop must be located in such a way that it can be seen from a safe distance from any direction which a reasonable person may approach. All chicken feed must be stored in air-tight, wildlife-resistant containers kept in an area inaccessible to animals. Leftover feed must be removed from outdoor enclosures each day.

Any wildlife conflicts should be documented and reported to the provincial conservation officer service at 1-877-952-7277.

Can I sell the eggs that my chickens produce?

Yes, eggs produced by backyard flocks can be sold in accordance with the descriptions of a Home Occupation or Home Industry under the bylaws for your area. Manure, meat or other products must not be sold.



How do I manage the manure produced by my chickens?

The CRD limits the maximum size of a chicken manure pile to no more than five cubic metres (176.6 cubic feet). To reduce the fire hazard from heat generated by manure during composting, the pile must be located a minimum of 7.6 metres (24.9 feet) from any property line or dwelling. To protect water quality, the coop must be placed a minimum of 30 metres from any water well or natural boundary of a lake, watercourse or wetland. Excess manure must be disposed of immediately and lawfully. CRD landfill sites accept animal manure for disposal.

Where can I read the bylaw?

CRD Zoning Bylaws can be found on our website at cariboord.ca/resources/bylaws. If you do not know the zoning or Bylaw for your property, you can also research this on the CRD website via the Property Search function found at cariboord.ca/CityViewPortal/Property/ or by contacting planning department staff at the CRD by phone or by emailing your request for information to them at zoning@cariboord.ca.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

Being a good neighbour

Chickens can be noisy – especially roosters! Think carefully before you acquire a rooster – they are not necessary to produce eggs, and cannot be prevented from crowing whenever they feel like it, although they can provide the flock with some protection from predators. If you are locating your coop where you think a neighbour might be disturbed by crowing, consider forgoing having a rooster unless you are planning on breeding chickens of your own.

Ensure that your chickens cannot escape their coop or run. Not only can your chickens be harmed by predators or even toxic weeds they might eat if they escape, they could also lay waste to your, or your neighbour's gardens.

Take care to locate your manure pile in a location that will not bother neighbours. If it is composted correctly, it should not be too smelly, but if you turn the pile during composting, it will smell for a day or two after. No one wants to smell that in their kitchen. It is useful to also consider the prevailing wind direction in your area when siting your coop and manure pile, so the wind is not constantly blowing the odour of the pile towards someone's home.

When siting your coop and manure pile, consider the topography of your property. Try to locate coops and piles where they will not be inundated by seasonal run off or heavy precipitation and leach into ditches, lakes, streams or wetlands. Leachate from agricultural operations can be detrimental to aquatic ecosystems and human health if it enters your drinking water.

Helpful Tips

In addition to the coop and run, for the health of a flock, the owner should provide them with a dust bath; ample, fresh, clean water, and appropriate food. The coop must be equipped with roosts and nesting boxes to accommodate the flock and enable them to roost off the ground when they wish.



Feeders should be made of a non-corrosive material that is easily cleaned, minimizes spillage, prevents contamination by droppings and keeps the food dry. The containers should be large or numerous enough to prevent competition for food or intimidation.

Hay, grain and prepared feed should be fresh, less than one year old, and free of mold, insects or other contaminants. Onions, avocados and chocolate are a few human foods that are toxic to your chickens. Ensure they are not present in food scraps that you feed to your chickens. Chickens should also be provided with oyster shell or limestone supplements to ensure adequate calcium for strong egg shells.

Water receptacles should be made of non-corrosive material, be easy to clean and disinfect (a solution of chlorine bleach works well, provided that the container is thoroughly rinsed prior to use), prevent dropping contamination, and hold ample water for all the birds in the coop for a day. Position the water containers slightly higher than the feeders or far enough away from each other to prevent contamination. Hanging them from ropes from the coop ceiling can be very effective as it prevents the containers from being tipped over.

One nest box should be provided for every two to three hens, close to the floor, or, if higher, located with a perch in front of the boxes to facilitate access for the birds. Each box should have two to four inches of clean straw at all times – this helps the hen feel comfortable and reduces breakage of the eggs. Eggs should be collected once or twice per day.

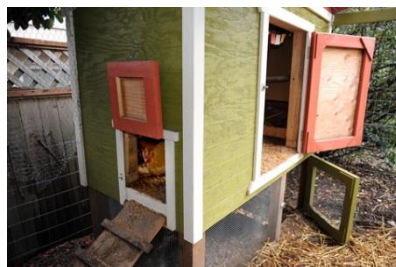
Additional considerations for locating your chicken coop and run include ensuring that the coop will provide your birds with shade during the heat of summer, ensuring hens have access to direct sunlight, and locating the structure somewhere with good drainage and protection from prevailing winds. The coop should also provide some natural light and ventilation from windows. You should be able to see clearly inside the coop without a light on during the day.

Coops should be enclosed to provide shelter from heat, extreme cold, wind, rain, snow and predators and provide for roosting, nesting, feeding and watering. A coop can be purchased ready-made, as a kit, constructed within an existing shed, or built from scratch. The floor should be easy to clean and retain heat in cold weather. It should keep out rodents and predators and it should not collect or accumulate moisture. A concrete floor for a coop is ideal to discourage rodents and predators and for ease of cleaning.

Whatever floor type you use, bedding should be strewn on the surface to absorb droppings and ease cleaning. Wood shavings, dry leaves and straw all work well and can be easily composted. Avoid chemically treated woods in both the shavings and structure of the coop since these chemicals may be harmful to your hens.

Use a roofing material for the coop that will not collect or retain heat in the summer. Openings along the eaves, screened with ½" metal screening, will keep out predators and enable cross-drafts for ventilation. The roof should be sloped to drain water and snow.

Chicken doors should be just large enough for the largest bird and located from ground level up to two feet above with a stable ramp that has cleats. You should be able to shut these doors at night to keep out predators. Ensure the coop is also easy for humans to access for feeding, cleaning and collection of eggs.



Coop windows should be able to be opened for ventilation and be screened with ½' metal screen to keep out predators. Perches and roosts can be made from lumber or branches, and should be strong and securely mounted to hold the birds. The roost and perch surfaces should be roughened for grip but have no splinters that could injure your hens.

Hens are quite cold tolerant if they are dry and the coop is free of drafts, but a little additional heat will likely be needed in the cold winters of the Cariboo Chilcotin. Consider your options carefully since this can create a fire hazard, and pick an option that will provide enough heat to keep your birds comfortable, but not cause overheating in the coop.

Pest control and sanitation

Chickens are prone to pests like mites and parasites which can be controlled by ensuring your birds have access to a dust bath at all times. Dust baths are pretty much a chicken's favourite thing in the world, and if they have access to a bare patch of earth, they will likely dig their own, however; if they do not have access to bare earth, you should provide them with a dust bath. It is useful to occasionally treat the dust bath with diatomaceous earth to provide additional mite control.

Keeping shelter areas dry and clean will prevent bacteria, fungi, insects and rodent attraction. Remove manure and wet bedding from the coop and run daily. At least once per year the coop must be thoroughly cleaned, including walls and perches, removal of all bedding and disinfecting of the coop and its furnishings. If your birds are diagnosed with an illness, clean and disinfect the entire coop before reintroducing healthy hens. Housing hens in spacious, clean and relatively dust-free environments will keep them healthy and minimize human exposure to infectious disease.

Chickens have many natural predators, among them coyotes, bears, foxes, cougars, raccoons, weasels, mink and dogs. Birds of prey may also see a meal in one of your chickens. Too often, conflicts between predators and chickens result in the extermination of the predator when simply removing the attractants to those predators can prevent the problem before it starts.

Outdoor runs should be built and fenced to keep out predators with fencing that extends all the way to the ground (preferably, the bottom of the fence will be buried), and the roof of the outdoor run should be covered by mesh to prevent wild birds from getting in. This will also help prevent the transfer of avian diseases to your flock.

How much time do I need to take care of my chickens?



We recommend that you ensure you have enough time to be able to maintain your flock in good health and sanitary conditions. Generally, one hour per day is considered the minimum amount of time required to maintain your chickens and their coop.

Hens require care at least twice per day – once in the morning and again in the evening. In the morning, they must be fed, their water changed and the coop checked for safety issues, and the birds for any injuries or health issues requiring immediate attention. In the evening, refresh their water, replenish their food, collect eggs and ensure the birds are safely confined in the coop for the night. The coop should be cleaned once per day, either in the morning or in the evening.

It's important to consider what you will do about caring for your flock should you go away for weekends or vacations. Is there someone you know who can take care of your birds for you, who has the necessary knowledge?

What can I do with the chicken manure produced by my flock?

You may not sell chicken manure, but, once fully composted, it is a great garden additive! It is necessary to compost chicken manure prior to adding it to garden soil since it can harm plants if it has not been adequately composted. The composting process can be accelerated by ensuring that you include the coop bedding in the compost pile – the additional carbon in the bedding material (if it is straw or sawdust) helps balance the nitrogen content of the manure. Adding compost worms (*Eisenia fetida*) to your manure pile can also speed the composting process, improve the quality of the compost and help to reduce odour. Locate the pile so that it will not generate excessive heat or become waterlogged.

How long will a chicken produce eggs?

Chickens generally begin laying eggs when they are pullets at around six months of age. Egg production peaks at eighteen months old and declines with age. You can expect a chicken at its peak to produce roughly one egg per day, though this can vary by breed, age of bird and by the time of year. You do not need a rooster for your hens to produce eggs.

Give thought to what you will do with your chickens when they are no longer producing eggs. A healthy chicken can live up to 14 years or longer – as long as a dog or a cat! Commercial operations usually slaughter chickens once they pass their peak of egg production. If you plan to do the same, ensure that you will be using humane slaughter methods, and if you are inexperienced, find experienced help for this process.

Handling chickens and taking them to the veterinarian

Before you need them, find a local veterinarian that is willing and capable of looking after your chickens. When it is necessary to transport a bird to the vet, the hen may be placed in a pet carrier lined with a towel, shredded paper, or straw (remove the lid, then replace it once the bird is secure inside). Avoid extreme weather conditions when transporting a sick bird. Heat exhaustion can develop in as little as ten minutes in a hot car. Offer a little fresh food like greens or cucumber for long trips to reduce the bird's stress.

Never handle a chicken by its wings, feet or legs. To catch a chicken, herd it into a corner slowly and calmly (fast movements indicate predators to a chicken). Place your hands over the top of its wings (shoulders) and hold the bird securely without squeezing too tightly. Pick the bird up and hold it under your arm to keep its wings contained and support its feet if the bird tolerates it. To restrain for examination, drape a towel over the bird's shoulders, then wrap it around the bird's body.

Social needs of your hens

A single chicken is usually a sad chicken. Plan to have at least two since they are flock animals and need companionship. Avoid overcrowding, which can cause competition and conflict. Temperament and social

structures of the flock should be considered and if needed, incompatible birds should be separated.

Hens spend the majority of their days actively, grazing, foraging for food (plants and insects), dust bathing, preening, playing and napping. They are sociable, intelligent animals that can form lasting bonds with each other and other species. Because of their keen intelligence and instinctive physical activity, they require a stimulating environment that mimics as much as possible the rich and diverse world in which they evolved to thrive.

Useful Information and References

We strongly recommend that you educate yourselves as much as possible about keeping healthy backyard chickens prior to acquiring birds and starting your flock. There are many resources both online, and within the local community that can help you become well-informed about both the benefits and risks of keeping backyard hens. The inclusion of these resources on this list in no way constitutes an endorsement of them by the CRD.

Books:

Damerow, G. (2010). *Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens: Care/Feeding/Facilities*. Storey Publishing.

Hobson, Jeremy and Lewis, Celia. (2007). *Keeping Chickens: The Essential Guide*. David & Charles.

Lee, Andrew W. and Foreman, Patricia L. (2011). *Chicken Tractor: The Permaculture Guide to Happy Hens and Healthy Soil*. Good Earth Publications.

Luttman, Rick. (1976). *Chickens in Your Backyard*. Rodale Books.

Rossier, Jay. (2004). *Living with Chickens: Everything You Need to Know to Raise Your Own Backyard Flock*. Lyons Press.

Websites:

Backyard Chickens. (2014). *Raising Backyard chickens*.
<http://www.backyardchickens.com/>

Backyard Poultry Magazine. (2014, June 18).
<http://www.backyardpoultrymag.com/>

BC Ministry of Agriculture. (2014, June 18). *AGRI Poultry Factsheets & Publications*. <http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/poultry/factsheets.htm>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2014, June 18). *Biosecurity Tools - Animals*.
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/biosecurity/tools/eng/1344790074044/1344790183249>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2014, June 18). Bird Health Basics – How to Prevent and Detect Disease in Backyard Flocks and Pet Birds.
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/avflu/bacdofloeelee.shtml>

Mother Earth News. (2009). The Chicken and Egg Page.
<http://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/eggs-zl0z0703zswa.aspx#axzz350wakZhn>

Poultry One. (2012). *Your Guide to the World of Chickens*. Retrieved from PoultryOne Guide to Raising Backyard Chickens:
<http://poultryone.com/>

The Chicken Crossing.org (2014, June).
<http://www.chickencrossing.org/coopis.html>

University of Maine. (2009) *Poultry Facts – Tips for Egg Safety from Farm to Table for Small Poultry Flock Owners*.
<http://www.umaine.edu/livestock/Publications/TipsForEggSafety.htm>



building communities together



@CaribooRD

cariboord.ca

facebook.com/caribooregion



Phone 250-392-3351 or 1-800-665-1636 Suite D, 180 North 3rd Avenue, Williams Lake, BC V2G 2A4