

# Introduction

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**F**rom California, where Rob lives, to Michigan, where Kim lives, and all parts around and between, people are discovering the joy of chickens. Some are practical, wanting to explore producing their own food; some are nostalgic, longing for a simpler, more pastoral time; and others are sucked in by some cute chicks.

Chickens are a special part of both authors' lives. Everyday we listen to the questions and concerns that people have about chickens. We take great enjoyment in the chickens that we own, too. We are thrilled that more cities and townships are allowing people to keep chickens. But that means there is an ever-growing body of folks who need information about chickens. Because Rob and I can't always be there to answer your chicken questions, we decided it was time for a modern, comprehensive chicken book that provides quick answers to all your chicken questions.

## *About This Book*

This chicken book is different from some of the others out there. It's easy to find the answer you're looking for because of the way the book is organized. Go ahead, flip through the book and see for yourself. Nice bold headings direct your eyes to just the section you need, and you don't have to read the whole book for a quick answer.

This book is a broad overlook at all aspects of keeping chickens, from laying hens to meat chickens. Today you may be interested in learning how to care for some cute, fluff-ball chicks you fell in love with at the hardware store, and you'll find that information here. In five months or so, when they begin laying eggs, you'll need information on what to do and how to manage hens. That information is here too.

And if you get tired of those chicks because they all turn out to be big, fat, noisy roosters, well, we give you good butchering instructions to turn them into chicken fricassee. So put this book on your bookshelf in a prominent place. We're sure you'll refer to it again and again.

We're careful to use modern, scientifically correct information on chicken care and direct your attention to sources of additional information when necessary. But we also throw in lots of good, homey, down-to-earth advice that can only come from owning and enjoying our own chickens.

## Conventions Used in This Book

Conventions are certain standard techniques that are used in a book like this one. For example:

- ✔ All Web addresses appear in `monofont` so that they're easy to spot.  
Because of the way the book is printed, some Web addresses may break to the next line. We don't add any characters like a hyphen if this happens, so copy the address just as you see it.
- ✔ New terms appear in *italic* and are closely followed by easy-to-understand definitions.
- ✔ **Bold** is used to highlight the keywords in bulleted lists.

## What You're Not to Read

Of course, we think each and every word that we painstakingly wrote is effective and important, but because you don't have to read this book cover to cover, it helps to know what type of info you can skip without guilt. Maybe we should say "what you don't *need* to read" instead. Sometimes we had that neat little story we wanted to share, but it isn't really something you need to know. So we put it in a sidebar — those gray boxes filled with text. Feel free to skip any sidebar you want, but be forewarned that you will miss out on some fun stuff.

Sometimes we also had some technical stuff for those of you we thought might want a little more detail. These parts aren't crucial, though, to your chicken-keeping experience. They are marked with a "Technical Stuff" icon.

## Foolish Assumptions

To get this book flowing, we had to factor in some assumptions about you, the reader. Here's how we've sized you up:

- ✔ You want to find out more about keeping chickens or eating the chickens you do have.
- ✔ You like animals and want to treat them with kindness and some knowledge of their needs.

- ✔ Although you've seen and heard a chicken before, you aren't an expert on chickens yet and need some very basic information.
- ✔ You don't want to raise chickens on some monster scale like 500 laying hens or 2,500 broilers. We assume the readers of this book want information on small home flocks.
- ✔ You have some very basic carpentry or craft skills. Although we do have some very basic plans for building chicken housing in this book, we don't have enough room in this book to teach you building skills. So if you don't have the skills, we give you permission to call on a friend who does.

## *How This Book Is Organized*

To easily and quickly access information, you need organization that is logical and precise. This book is broken into parts and then chapters, which are a grouping of information on a particular aspect of chicken-raising, say, raising baby chicks. Chapters are then broken into sections, with bold headings that help your eyes find what they're looking for.

We know you're going to like this book and use it often. So we're going to give you just a tiny taste of the book's organization here.

### *Part I: Choosing Chickens*

These chapters explore your reasons for wanting to keep chickens, talk about basic chicken biology (Chapter 2), and give you some information on breeds of chickens (Chapter 3). This part also takes you through planning and purchasing your flock (Chapter 4).

### *Part II: Housing Your Flock*

This part covers basic chicken-keeping skills, whether you want eggs or meat. In Chapter 5 we talk about chicken housing that's used for various types of chickens. In Chapter 6 we go a bit farther with housing, giving you suggestions for designing chicken coops. In Chapter 7 we cover the basics of getting your coop set up and keeping it in good working order.

## ***Part III: Caring For Your Flock: General Management***

Obviously, caring for your chickens takes some time and effort, and this part covers the basics on care. Chapter 8 discusses something very important to the chickens — feeding. Yes, chickens will eat anything, but you need to know the best way to feed your chickens.

Of course, food isn't the only thing that keeps your chickens healthy. You have to protect them from predators and pests (Chapter 9), plus you have to take an active role in preventive health (Chapter 10) and recognize and treat illness (Chapter 11).

## ***Part IV: Breeding: From Chicken to Egg and Back Again***

This part focuses on one thing: making more chickens. Chicken reproduction is a fascinating journey. In Chapter 12 we discuss mating, and in Chapter 13 we discuss incubating eggs, both artificially and nature's way. Of course, the chicken reproductive process doesn't stop just at the eggs . . . they do have to hatch. So, in Chapter 14 we cover how to care for those chicks when they do.

## ***Part V: Special Management Considerations***

The chapters in this part focus on the specialized things you need to know about keeping chickens for a particular purpose, such as to give you table eggs. In Chapter 15, we discuss managing laying hens so that they can produce good eggs for you consistently. Check out Chapter 16 for the finer points of raising chickens for meat as well as butchering chickens and storing their meat.

## ***Part VI: The Part of Tens***

This last part, known in a *For Dummies* book as The Part of Tens, gives you some quick-reference reviews or information we didn't include elsewhere. In Chapter 17 we offer tips for raising healthy chickens, and in Chapter 18 we talk about some common chicken misconceptions — talk about foolish assumptions!

## Icons Used in This Book

Icons are special symbols set in the margins near paragraphs of text in the book. They are meant to draw your attention. Some people use them as a way to access certain pieces of important information, such as tips. This book uses the following icons.



Tips are special time- or money-saving pieces of advice. They come from our years of experience with chickens.



This icon urges you to remember this piece of information because it's important. Sometimes a referral to another chapter for more precise information may be nearby.



A warning icon means we are mentioning something that may pose a danger to you or your chickens. Pay attention to warning icons as they contain important information.



This icon means we're providing some technical information that may or may not interest you. You can skip this paragraph if you want, without missing any important information.

## Where to Go from Here

All right, let's get reading. May we make some suggestions on where you may want to start? Of course, eventually you'll want to read every scrap of this book, but there may be some things you need to know — now!

Here are some ideas of where you may want to begin, depending on your situation:

- ✓ If you're one of those rare people who likes to be well-prepared before you start a project like raising chickens, you may want to start with Chapter 1.
- ✓ If you're sitting here with the book in one hand and a box of chicks at your feet, you may want to start with Chapter 14 to get more info on raising chicks.

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## Raising Chickens For Dummies

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- ✔ If you have some chickens and they aren't laying the eggs you expected, you need to flip to Chapter 15.
- ✔ If you have chickens and they don't appear to be doing so well, check out Chapter 11 to figure out and treat whatever your chickens may be suffering from.
- ✔ If someone gave you some chicks for Easter that turned into ten fighting and crowing roosters, try Chapter 16, which discusses how to turn them into something more valuable — meat for the freezer.