



UK Edition

Making Everything Easier!™

Keeping Chickens

FOR DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Feed and care for your chickens
- Breed and rear chicks
- Construct the perfect hen house
- Keep your chickens happy and healthy

Pammy Riggs

Farmer and columnist

Kimberley Willis

Poultry breeder and enthusiast

Rob Ludlow

Owner, BackYardChickens.com





Making Everything Easier!™

Keeping Chickens

FOR DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Feed and care for your chickens
- Breed and rear chicks
- Construct the perfect hen house
- Keep your chickens happy and healthy

Pammy Riggs

Farmer and columnist

Kimberley Willis

Poultry breeder and enthusiast

Rob Ludlow

Owner, BackYardChickens.com



Keeping Chickens For Dummies®

Visit

www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/keepingchickensuk to view this book's cheat sheet.

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[About This Book](#)

[Conventions Used in This Book](#)

[What You're Not to Read](#)

[Foolish Assumptions](#)

[How This Book Is Organised](#)

[Part I: Choosing Chickens](#)

[Part II: Housing Your Flock](#)

[Part III: Caring For Your Flock: General Management](#)

[Part IV: Breeding: The Chicken and the Egg](#)

[Part V: Considering Special Management Issues](#)

[Part VI: The Part of Tens](#)

[Icons Used in This Book](#)

[Where to Go from Here](#)

[Part I: Choosing Chickens](#)

Chapter 1: Enjoying Chicken-Keeping

Dealing with the Legal Issues

Knowing what info you need

Finding the info

Looking ahead to restrictions that may affect you later on

Assessing Your Capabilities: Basic Chicken Care and Requirements

Time

Space

Money

Focusing Your Intentions: Specific Considerations

Producing eggs (and, therefore, keeping layers)

Thinking about home-grown meat

Showing for adults and children

Taking Neighbours into Consideration

Chapter 2: Understanding Basic Chicken Biology and Behaviour

Familiarising Yourself with a Chicken's Physique

Identifying a Chicken's Many Parts

Checking out similarities and differences

Honing in on the head and neck

Weighing up the bulk of the body

Looking at the legs and feet

Checking out chicken skin

Finding out about feathers

Looking a Picture of Health

Keeping an Eye on Chicken Behaviour

Processing information

Communicating with each other

Investigating chicken table manners

Taking a kip

Socialising together

Romancing the hens

Living without a cockerel - the celibate

hen

Going broody

Taking a bath - different for a chicken

Chapter 3: Getting Familiar with Chicken Breeds

Knowing What You Need to Know: A Brief

Synopsis

Speaking the lingo: Common breed

terminology

Categorising breeds

Wanting It All: Dual-Purpose Breeds

Filling Your Basket: Laying Breeds

[White-egg layers](#)
[Brown-egg layers](#)
[Coloured-egg layers](#)

[Filling Your Plate: Best Breeds for the Table](#)
[Choosing Breeds for Showing](#)
[Keeping Perfect Pets: Bantam Breeds](#)
[Supporting Heritage and Rare Breeds](#)

[Chapter 4: Buying Chickens](#)

[Planning Your Flock](#)

[Deciding what you'll start with: Eggs, chicks or adults](#)
[Choosing the gender](#)
[Selecting the right number of chickens](#)

[Counting the Costs](#) [Starting with Chicks](#)

[Where to buy chicks](#)
[When to buy chicks](#)
[What to look for](#)
[Handling chicks](#)

[Starting with Adults](#)

[Where to buy adult chickens](#)
[When to buy adult chickens](#)
[What to look for](#)

[Transporting Your Birds Safely](#)

Part II: Housing Your Flock

Chapter 5: Going House Hunting for Your Chickens

Knowing What a Chicken Needs in a Home

Shelter from wind and rain

Temperature control

Protection from predators

Enough space to move about in comfort

Sufficient lighting

Fresh air

Clean surroundings

Surveying Your Housing Options

Using cages as temporary housing

Rearing birds inside

Pairing a shelter with a run

Offering shelter with free-range access

Looking at small, all-in-one units

Considering an ark or hoop run

Meeting some mobile housing methods

Sussing out specialist designs

Getting fancy: The chicken garden

Choosing a Type of Housing

Chapter 6: Designing and Constructing Chicken Housing

Deciding Whether to Build, Buy or Recycle? That is the Question

Making do with what you've got - reuse
and recycle

Building from scratch

Buying ready-made houses

Checking Housing Restrictions

Choosing the Right Location

Establishing Form and Function: The Basic
Blueprint

Size and shape: Giving your birds some
breathing space

Ventilation: Allowing fresh air to flow

Having contingency plans

Providing perfect perches

Feathering their nests

Designing an outdoor space for your birds

Miscellany: What more can you possibly
want?

Being Mindful of Materials

Getting to the bottom of flooring

Constructing the frame

Understanding fencing

Supporting fencing with posts

Installing Wiring and Fixtures

Providing the hook-ups (electrical, that is)

Lighting up

Chapter 7: Furnishing and Housekeeping

Bedding Down

Making Nests Comfy and Cosy

Setting the Table: Equipping Your Birds' Dining Room

Feeding containers

Watering containers

Storing feed properly

Good Housekeeping

Gathering your tools

Seeing what you need to do, and when

Disposing of manure and old bedding

Part III: Caring for Your Flock: General Management

Chapter 8: Feeding Your Flock

Feeding Basics

Understanding why you need to manage your birds' diet

Knowing what nutrients chickens need

Comparing your feed options

Avoiding feeding chickens the wrong things

Choosing the Right Commercial Feed

Demystifying commercial rations
Selecting a form of feed
Double-checking the label

Supplementing Diets with Grit
Deciding When to Put Out Feed
Determining How Much to Feed
Keeping the Diet Interesting by Offering Treats
Keeping the Water Flowing

Chapter 9: Controlling Pests and Predators

Keeping Pests at Bay

Preventing pests
Identifying and eliminating common culprits

Fending Off Predators

Providing safe surroundings
Recognising common chicken predators
Working out who's causing trouble
Catching the troublemaker

Chapter 10: Keeping Your Flock Happy and Healthy

Taking Basic Precautions to Protect Your Flock

Dealing with heat, cold and dampness
Handling your birds safely

Keeping your chickens safe from poisons

Catching Chickens

Getting hold of chickens at night

Catching chickens during the day

Retrieving chickens on the run

Carrying and Holding Chicks and Chickens

Preventing Illness and Disease

Maintaining a healthy environment

Giving vaccinations

Erecting barriers against parasites

Quarantining new birds or those that

have been off your property.

Diffusing Stress

Managing the moult

Introducing new birds carefully

Discouraging bullying behaviours

Employing Grooming Procedures

Cutting long, curled nails

Trimming wings and other feathers

Finding a Good Vet, Just in Case

Marking Birds for Easy Identification

Chapter 11: Handling Health Problems

Treating Injuries

Giving your bird a health check

Keeping an injured bird safe

Dealing with skin injuries, cuts and
puncture wounds

Tending to foot sores

Treating head injuries

Tending to broken legs or wings

Fighting frostbite

Tackling egg binding

Getting Rid of Parasites

Internal parasites

External parasites

Recognising and Dealing with Disease

Checking for signs of disease

Considering bird flu

Making decisions about treatment

Using simple natural remedies

Administering Medications

Encountering Death

Part IV: Breeding: The Chicken and the Egg

Chapter 12: Breeding Your Chickens

Sexing Chickens: Cockerel or Hen?

[Sexing young chickens](#)
[Sexing mature chickens](#)

[Reviewing the Reproductive System](#)

[Cockerels](#)

[Hens](#)

[How an egg is formed](#)

[How an egg is fertilised](#)

[Watching Reproductive Behaviour](#)

[Courtship and mating](#)

[Nesting and brooding behaviour](#)

[Looking at Mating Methods](#)

[Flock mating](#)

[Pair and trio mating](#)

[Artificial insemination](#)

[Selecting Birds for Breeding](#)

[Choosing the right combinations](#)

[Producing purebred chickens](#)

[Producing hybrids](#)

[Producing sex/colour-linked colours](#)

[Preparing Birds for Breeding](#)

[Feeding future parents](#)

[Providing optimum lighting and temperature](#)

[Trimming feathers](#)

[Chapter 13: Incubating Eggs and Hatching Chicks](#)

[Making More Chicks: Incubation Basics](#)
[Choosing Your Hatching Method](#)

[Looking at the two methods: Hens versus incubators](#)

[Determining which method is best for you](#)

[Letting Mother Nature Do It: The Broody Hen Method](#)

[Understanding why some hens brood, and others don't](#)

[Encouraging your hens to brood](#)

[Adding eggs to the nest](#)

[Giving a sitting hen what she needs](#)

[Caring for a hen and chicks](#)

[Going Artificial: The Incubator Method](#)

[Choosing an incubator](#)

[Accessorising your incubator](#)

[Setting up and caring for your incubator](#)

[Finding and storing fertile eggs](#)

[Caring for eggs in the incubator](#)

[Looking Inside the Egg](#)

[Egg ultrasound: Candling an egg](#)

[Knowing what to look for: Stages of embryonic growth](#)

[Helping a Chick to Hatch](#)

[Pinpointing the Problem When Things Go Wrong](#)

[Chapter 14: Raising Chicks](#)

[Understanding the Basics of Brooders](#)

[Knowing when chicks need a brooder](#)

[Comparing brooder sizes and shapes](#)

[Getting the temperature just right](#)

[Gauging temperature by your chicks' behaviour](#)

[Lighting the brooder](#)

[Providing suitable bedding for chicks](#)

[Buying or Building Your Brooder](#)

[Buying a commercial brooder](#)

[Making your own brooder](#)

[Helping a Hen Provide Protection](#)

[Feeding and Watering Chicks](#)

[Choosing a starter feed](#)

[Considering medicated feed](#)

[Understanding the feeding process](#)

[Leading a chick to water . . .](#)

[Rearing Chicks in Your Brooder](#)

Knowing what to do in the first hour
Negotiating the first few days
Trimming beaks
Preventing disease

Watching the Stages of Growth

One month: In-between-agers
Six weeks to maturity: Teenagers
Young cockerels and pullets

Getting Along: Chicks and Children

Facing up to human health issues
Instructing how to handle chicks properly

Part V: Considering Special Management Issues

Chapter 15: Looking After Layers and Collecting Eggs

Knowing What to Expect from Your Hens

The layer's life cycle
Internal factors that influence laying
External factors that influence laying

Managing Your Hens' Laying Years

Getting young hens ready to lay
Helping your pullets avoid stress
Providing encouragement

[Using lighting to encourage laying to start](#)

[Encouraging Egg Production After it Begins](#)

[Providing supplemental lighting to keep hens laying](#)

[Keeping up a routine to minimise stress](#)

[Retiring old birds when the laying days are done](#)

[Collecting and Cleaning Eggs](#)

[Putting your eggs in one basket](#)

[Cleaning your cache](#)

[Assessing Egg Quality](#)

[Identifying the parts of an egg](#)

[Looking at the outside](#)

[Looking at the inside](#)

[Storing and Handling Eggs](#)

[How to store eggs](#)

[Eggs to discard](#)

[What to do with excess eggs](#)

[Dealing with Production Problems and Bad Habits](#)

[Addressing the failure to lay](#)

[Bringing order to hens that lay all over the place](#)

[Getting a broody hen to go back to laying](#)

[Handling hens that break and eat eggs](#)

[Chapter 16: Managing Meat Birds](#)

[Rearing Chickens for Meat](#)

[Looking at the Three Main Approaches to](#)

[Rearing Meat Birds](#)

[Selecting the Right Chickens for You](#)

[Choosing a breed](#)

[Selecting a sex](#)

[Choosing the Best Time of Year](#)

[Deciding on Quantity or Quality](#)

[Caring for Meat Chickens](#)

[Getting the housing right](#)

[Focusing on nutrition](#)

[Choosing pastured or free-range poultry](#)

[Managing stress](#)

[Chapter 17: Taking Meat Birds through D-Day](#)

[Planning for D-Day](#)

[Assessing when your birds are ready](#)

[Deciding between making home kills or](#)

[visiting a poultry abattoir](#)

[Using a Licensed Poultry Slaughterer](#)

[Finding a suitable poultry abattoir](#)
[Knowing what to expect](#)

[Preparing to Do the Deed Yourself](#)

[Choosing the location](#)
[Gathering equipment and supplies](#)

[Dispatching and Dressing at Home](#)

[Humane and efficient home dispatching](#)
[Removing the feathers - plucking](#)
[Inspecting and dressing the bird](#)

[Packaging Home-Reared Poultry](#)

[Jointing and filleting](#)
[Selecting suitable packaging products](#)
[Packing it in](#)
[Avoiding freezer overload](#)
[Taking advantage of some freezer tips](#)

[Part VI: The Part of Tens](#)

[Chapter 18: More than Ten Tips for Keeping
Healthy, Stress-Free Chickens](#)

[Choose the Right Breed for Your Needs](#)
[Set Up Suitable Housing](#)
[Supplement Lighting when Needed](#)
[Control Pests](#)
[Protect Against Predators](#)
[Control Parasites](#)

Vaccinate Your Birds

Feed a Well-Balanced Diet

Provide Enough Clean Water

Beware Disease-Transmitting Dangers

Use Quarantines Whenever Necessary

Chapter 19: More than Ten Misconceptions about Chickens and Eggs

Bird Flu is a Risk to Reckon With

You Can't Keep Chickens in the City

Cockerels Crow Only in the Morning

You Need a Cockerel to Get Eggs

Keeping Chickens Panned is Inhumane

Chickens are Vegetarians

Big, Brown Organic Eggs are Best in Taste and Quality

Fertilised and Unfertilised Eggs are Easily

Distinguishable

Egg-Box Advertising is the Whole Truth

Chickens are Good for Your Garden

Chickens are Stupid

Cheat Sheet

Keeping Chickens For Dummies[®]

**by Pammy Riggs, Kimberly
Willis and Rob Ludlow**



Keeping Chickens For Dummies[®]

Published by
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd
The Atrium
Southern Gate
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 8SQ
England

E-mail (for orders and customer service enquires): cs-books@wiley.co.uk

Visit our Home Page on www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, West Sussex, England

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, West Sussex

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except under the terms of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a

licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS, UK, without the permission in writing of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, England, or emailed to permreq@wiley.co.uk, or faxed to (44) 1243 770620.

Trademarks: Wiley, the Wiley Publishing logo, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, A Reference for the Rest of Us!, The Dummies Way, Dummies Daily, The Fun and Easy Way, Dummies.com and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: The contents of this work are intended to further general scientific research, understanding, and discussion only and are not intended and should not be relied upon as recommending or promoting a specific method, diagnosis, or treatment by physicians for any particular patient. The publisher, the author, AND ANYONE ELSE INVOLVED IN PREPARING THIS WORK make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. In view of ongoing research, equipment modifications, changes in governmental regulations, and the constant flow of information relating to the use of medicines, equipment, and devices, the reader is urged to review and evaluate the information provided in the package insert or instructions for each medicine, equipment, or device for, among other things, any

changes in the instructions or indication of usage and for added warnings and precautions. Readers should consult with a specialist where appropriate. The fact that an organization or Website is referred to in this work as a citation and/or a potential source of further information does not mean that the author or the publisher endorses the information the organization or Website may provide or recommendations it may make. Further, readers should be aware that Internet Websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. No warranty may be created or extended by any promotional statements for this work. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for any damages arising herefrom.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

For technical support, please visit www.wiley.com/techsupport.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some content that appears in standard print versions of this book may not be available in other formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit us at www.wiley.com.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-119-99417-6 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-119-97178-8 (ebook), ISBN 978-1-119-99418-3 (ebook), ISBN 978-1-119-99419-0 (ebook)

Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Authors

Pammy Riggs and her family moved away from mainstream life more than twenty years ago to create a different kind of reality, transforming a bare, wet Devon field into Providence Farm (www.providencefarm.co.uk) – a thriving small organic farm and a cosy low-carbon home – planting woodland and reinstating wild meadows along the way.

In the warm light of this liberation of her life, Pammy now nurtures a burning desire to share her invaluable knowledge and vast experience. Pammy speaks and teaches at various educational institutions and has created a brand new home for her writing, courses and ideas for getting reconnected with a more natural and creative life at www.rootedin.co.uk. Her passion is to empower us all to get out from behind our computers and desks and get our hands dirty in the rich soil of life.

Kimberly Willis lives with her husband, Steve, on a small farm in the thumb area of Michigan. When not writing, she works at the MSU Extension office in Lapeer County, Michigan, as a horticulturalist and doubles as the resident chicken expert. Kim has raised a number of breeds of chickens and other types of poultry for over 30 years. She has shown poultry locally. She is an advocate for eating locally and sells her fresh brown eggs to friends and family. She is a proud member of www.backyardchickens.com.

Kim is also a garden writer and has numerous articles in print and online. You can read her work at www.life123.com or www.squidoo.com/gardeninggranny or her blog at www.gardeninggranny.blogspot.com.

Rob Ludlow, his wife Emily, and their two beautiful daughters, Alana and April, are the perfect example of the suburban family with a small flock of backyard chickens. Like countless others, what started out as a fun hobby raising a few egg-laying hens has almost turned into an addiction.

Originally, Rob started posting his experiences with chickens on his hobby website – www.Nifty-Stuff.com – but after realising how much his obsession with chickens was growing, he decided to concentrate his efforts on a site devoted completely to the subject. Now, Rob owns and manages www.backyardchickens.com (BYC), the largest and fastest-growing community of chicken enthusiasts in the world.

Rob hopes to work with BYC's tens of thousands of members to promote a change of the old concept, 'a chicken in every pot', to a new version, the BYC vision – 'a chicken in every yard'!

Dedications

Pammy Riggs: To my darling Mum, Joy Seales, who gave me all that Scottish education and time mucking about in Scottish farmyards – valuable compost for a fruitful animal-filled life.

Kimberly Willis: I would like to dedicate this book to my husband, Steve, who took over the cooking and dishes so I could concentrate on my latest book.

Rob Ludlow: To the three most important girls in my life – Emily, Alana and April – who not only support but also

contribute to my joy of raising backyard chickens.

Authors' Acknowledgments

Pammy Riggs: Thank you, Dummies, for choosing me and hand-holding me through this first book. Thanks, also, to *Country Smallholding* magazine for launching my writing by giving me a regular 'Chicken Whisperer' column, and last but not least thanks to my husband, Ritchie Riggs, whose irreverent humour and grounded common sense is the sounding board I value.

Kimberly Willis: I would like to acknowledge all the help that Jennifer Connolly has given me with my first Dummies book as well as acknowledge all the hard work that Christy Pingleton has done on this book. I would also like to acknowledge the fun chicken website, www.backyardchickens.com, which gave me much insight on the concerns new chicken owners have.

Rob Ludlow: Thanks to my brother Michael for getting me started with chickens, and to Mike Baker and Kristin DeMint for their help with the project. Especially huge thanks to the incredibly smart, patient and helpful staff at www.backyardchickens.com, and the thousands of friendly BYC community members.

Publisher's Acknowledgements

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at

www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

Commissioning, Editorial, and Media Development

Development Editor: Steve Edwards

Commissioning Editor: Claire Ruston

Assistant Editor: Ben Kemble

Copy Editor: Anne O'Rorke

Proofreader: Andy Finch

Production Manager: Daniel Mersey

Cover Photos: © Vincent O'Byrne/Alamy

Cartoons: Ed McLachlan

Composition Services

Project Coordinator: Kristie Rees

Layout and Graphics: Carl Byers, Lavonne Roberts, Corrie Socolovitch

Proofreader: Lindsay Amones

Indexer: Claudia Bourbeau

Publishing and Editorial for Consumer Dummies

Kathleen Nebenhaus, Vice President and Executive Publisher

Kristin Ferguson-Wagstaffe, Product Development Director

Ensley Eikenburg, Associate Publisher, Travel

Kelly Regan, Editorial Director, Travel

Publishing for Technology Dummies

Andy Cummings, Vice President and Publisher

Composition Services

Debbie Stailey, Director of Composition Services

Introduction

All over the country, more and more people are discovering the joy of chickens. Some people are practical, wanting to explore producing their own food; some are nostalgic, longing for a taste of ‘the good life’; and other people are drawn in by the sight of some pretty chicks.

Chickens are a special part of the authors’ lives. Everyday we listen to the questions and concerns that people have about chickens, and we take great enjoyment in the chickens that we own, too. We’re thrilled that more and more people in towns, cities and villages across the country want to keep chickens, but that means the body of people who need information about chickens just keeps on growing. Because we can’t be there to answer questions in person, we decided it was time for a modern, comprehensive chicken book that provides quick answers to all your questions – and here it is!

About This Book

This chicken book is different from some of the others out there – you can find the answers you’re looking for more easily here because of the way we’ve organised the book. Go ahead, flip through the book and see for yourself. Bold headings direct your eyes to the very sections you need, and you don’t have to read the whole book for a quick answer.

We’ve written this book to give you a broad overview of all aspects of keeping chickens, from laying hens to meat chickens. Today you may be interested in discovering how to care for some cute, fluffy chicks you fell in love with at a country fair, and you can find that information here. In five months or so,

when they begin laying eggs, you 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 cockerels, well, we give you thorough instructions on how to turn them into a roast chicken dinner. So put this book on your bookshelf in a prominent place so that you can 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, everyday, down-to-earth advice that can only come from owning and enjoying our own chickens.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you find what you want quickly, we use a few conventions throughout the book. For example:

- ✓ All web addresses appear in monofont so that you can spot them easily.

Because of the way the book is printed, some web addresses may break to the next line. We don't add any characters such as a hyphen if this happens, and so copy the address just as you see it.

- ✓ New terms appear in *italic* and are closely followed by easy-to-understand definitions.
- ✓ We use **bold** to highlight the keywords in lists.