

Raise Chickens For Meat And Eggs

Whether you live in a suburban or rural location, if you're interested in preparing for the worst or you simply want to be as self-sufficient as possible, keeping chickens is a great way to free your family from some of their dependence on the supermarket.

Just think of how often you make a trip to the store just to get eggs, and now imagine having your own laying [hens producing eggs](#) right in your backyard.

Keeping a few chickens is really a no-brainer for anyone living in the country or on a rural farmstead, but if you live in a suburban or even an urban area, you may still be able to keep a few. Simply check your local city and/or homeowner's association ordinances.

Although roosters are explicitly banned in most urban areas, a lot of cities and towns still allow families to keep a certain number of laying hens, usually between 3 – 6 birds or more.

If you're interested purely in egg production, some of the best breeds for eggs include:

- The **Leghorn** is a light-weight egg-laying champion originally bred and raised in Tuscany, Italy. Prolific egg layers, these birds come in black, white and a range of brown shades; hens lay an average of 280 eggs a year, with some hens producing as many as 300 – 320 eggs in a year. Leghorn eggshells are white, with hens maturing quickly to begin laying as early as 6 months old, but they are a shyer, more flighty breed.



- The **Orloff** originally hailed from Persia, but was popularized by the efforts of, and named after, a Russian count: Alexei Orlov. With their range of colors and exceptional egg laying capability, these robust birds grow to a healthy weight of 6 – 9 pounds and are most notable for their hardiness and general resistance to cold. For survivalists, homesteaders or families who live in more northern reaches, the Orloff is an excellent, hardy breed; a reliable egg-layer with decent potential as a meat bird if necessary.



- **Ancona** hens are excellent, compact egg-layers, with adult hens reaching 4 – 5 lbs. and cocks only ~6 lbs. Capable of reliably laying 250 – 300 eggs a year, this

breed lays a large, white egg. Ancona chickens are also a hardy breed, capable of adapting to hot and cold temperature extremes, as well as tolerant of some humidity.



Aside from great egg-laying breeds, however, [chickens also taste great](#) and they are one of the most affordable of all meats to raise. Raising chickens is also fairly easy, especially if you have the space to let them free range, so if meat-production is what you're most interested in here are some of the best breeds to consider:

- The **Cornish Cross** and related hybrids are a very popular breed of broiler chicken. Capable of reaching a slaughter weight of 6 lbs. in as little as 5 – 8 weeks from hatching due to their super-fast growth rate, this is the breed of choice amongst commercial producers and they far outpace most other meat breeds and all dual-purpose breeds. Due to their exceptional rate of growth, the activity level of this breed is very low.



- The **Bresse** breed of chickens, a sizeable white bird with distinctive blue feet, is a very popular (and expensive) breed of chicken raised in France. Although initial breeding stock may be hard to come by, Bresse are prized for the tenderness and richer flavor of their meat. A closely related breed that is more easily obtained is the Blue Foot breed of chickens bred by a group of Canadians who obtained original Bresse stock from France.



For those who want the best of both worlds, there are a number of utility breeds that serve well as both laying hens and meat birds. Some of the most common dual-purpose breeds to keep are:

- **Orpington** chickens are great egg layers and the hens are notoriously good for brooding and hatching chicks.

Distinctively fluffy looking with their mass of feathers, Orpington chickens come in a variety of colors, including white, buff, black, blue and other shades. They lay medium to large-sized, brown eggs, with a steady production of 175 – 200 or more eggs per year. Traditionally, Orpington hens were said to lay as many as 320+ eggs per year, but generations of breeding for show and looks rather than utility has detracted from some of the egg-laying capability of this breed. Adult hens and cocks range in weight from 7 – 10 lbs. or more. They can also tolerate cold, but don't handle rain well. Finally, Orpington hens make excellent brood mothers and can be used to [hatch the eggs](#) of other hens, ducks and fowl.



- The **Rhode Island Red** is a prolific egg-laying dual-purpose breed, with hens laying anywhere from 200 – 300 large, brown eggs per year based on the quality of their feed. Hens and cocks range in weight from 6 – 9 lbs., and although the girls can sometimes be a bit aloof, most reds are friendly birds, well-suited to a small backyard flock. When breeding Rhode Island Reds it's important to remember that the awesome egg-laying capabilities of this breed are passed down via the father.



- The **Plymouth Rock**, also commonly known as a Barred Rock after their most common color pattern, is another popular dual-purpose breed. Most sub-types of the Plymouth Rock are reliable egg-layers who will produce throughout winter, albeit with a decrease of production during the coldest months. Eggs from Plymouth Rock hens are large and range in color from dark to light brown. As meat birds, hens weigh an average of 7 – 8 lbs. or more, with grown males weighting $8 \frac{1}{2}$ – 9 lbs. or more. Plymouth Rock hens also make excellent brood hens and mothers, so they are excellent for hatching chicks.



- **New Hampshire Red** hens are reliable egg producers,

laying anywhere from 180 – 250 eggs per year or more. As a medium-sized bird, this breed is the result of selective breeding of Rhode Island Red chickens. New Hampshire reds reach maturity very quickly, and at an average of 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ – 8 lbs. they are suitable for broiling and roasting as well as other standard uses. In larger flocks, New Hampshire reds may display more competitiveness and aggression toward other hens.



Whether you have 40 sq. feet or 4000 sq. feet, a mixed flock of laying hens and meat-birds is a great way to start freeing you and your family from dependence. In addition to producing meat and eggs, feathers can also be harvested at slaughter time for use in quilting, pillow stuffing, jackets and many other common uses.

Best of all, you'll get to enjoy the companionship of your new feathered friends as well as save yourself a bundle of money.



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*This article has been written by **Gaia Rady** for [Survivopedia](#).*

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