



# Chicken Coop

## CHECKLIST

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## SO YOU'RE FINALLY CONSIDERING CHICKENS.

You're ready to add a small flock to your homestead (*or your backyard*) and you want to do it right. But where do you start? What's the first step? And what the heck are you going to do about a chicken coop?



Today we're tackling this very question, so consider this your great-big-everything-you-ever-needed-to-know-about-chicken-coops resource.

A word of warning: chickens tend to be the gateway into this great bit crazy world of modern-day homesteading, so I cannot be responsible if getting your first flock leads you down the road to bigger gardens, more chickens, and maybe even a goat in the future. You've been warned. ;)

— Jill

# BUILDING A CHICKEN COOP

## Option One: Remodel an Existing Building

If you have a small outbuilding, garden shed, or corner of an existing barn, any of these can semi-easily be converted into a coop.

## Option Two: Building a Chicken Coop from Scratch

Chicken coop plans abound online, and if you are sorta handy with tools and have no existing buildings to work with, this might be an attractive option. A coop doesn't have to be a mansion, as long as it is sturdy and stable.



## Option Three: Buy a Pre-Made Coop

This is probably my least-favorite option, as many of the pre-made coops I've seen are kinda flimsy and aren't exactly cheap. However, if you are in a hurry and need a coop **NOW**, it's worth a look. Many local farm or garden stores are carrying small chicken coop kits now, or you can even order them online or from Amazon.

# IMPORTANT ITEMS IN A CHICKEN COOP

## Chicken Roosts

### WHY:

By nature, chickens want to be up off the ground at night while they sleep. You will need some sort of roosting area in your coop to fulfill this need.

### REQUIREMENTS:

Our roosts are very simple — we drilled 2x4s around the perimeter of the coop and called it good. You can also do a variety of tiered roosts if you have a lot of birds — the style doesn't matter, as long as they have a way to get off the ground. Shoot for about 12" of roost space per bird — although they often crowd in much tighter than that. Also, you'll accumulate a lot of chicken poop under your roosting areas, so consider a removable board under this area to make cleaning easier.



## Nesting Boxes

### WHY:

Laying hens will seek out a private space to lay their eggs. Nesting boxes keep eggs off the ground and prevent them (*sometimes*) from getting broken or eaten by other animals. It's also much easier to collect eggs from a nesting box, versus having to hunt all over the yard for the hidden nest.



## REQUIREMENTS:

There are a million-and-one ways to create a nesting box. Shoot for a box that is around 12" high by 12" wide. You need approximately one box per four hens. However, I've found no matter how many chickens we've had, they almost always only use 1-2 boxes and just take turns. Place the boxes several feet off the ground.

**BONUS TIP:** [Click here to Learn about Herbs for Nesting Boxes](#)

## A Chicken Run or Yard



## WHY:

Chickens are designed to forage, hunt, and scratch. Keeping them constantly confined indoors in a very small space will create unhappy chickens, and ain't nobody wants unhappy chickens.

## REQUIREMENTS:

Make sure they have at least a small enclosure that allows them to get fresh air and scratch in the dirt a bit. If you live in the country with minimal predators, you may be able to simply open the door of the chicken coop so

the flock can have free range of your barnyard. However, if you live in town or have predators, this won't work. In those cases, I recommend building a small enclosed run or pen that is attached to your coop. Many chicken runs have coverings on top to prevent birds from flying over the top, and also to keep predators and birds of prey out of the run.

**BONUS TIP:** [Click here to Learn about How to Build a Chicken Run](#)

## Ventilation

### WHY:

Poorly ventilated coops equal sick birds, as ammonia and dust particles can build up in a stuffy coop. In very cold, damp climates, a build-up of humid air in the coop can increase your flock's chance of getting



frostbite. If you live in a very warm climate, you may even consider having a coop design that allows you to remove an entire section of wall to allow cool air to flow through the coop during the hottest months.

### REQUIREMENTS:

Ventilation can come from windows, actual vents, or holes drilled near the top of the coop. Remember that drafts (*cold air blowing directly on the birds*) are different than ventilation. Very drafty coops can cause problems, so try to keep your vents up high whenever possible. This is another reason roosts are important — they keep your birds off the floor and away from the coldest air.

## Bedding/Flooring

### WHY:

A **clean coop = healthy chickens**. It doesn't need to be hospital-grade sterile by any means, but you do need to avoid a build-up of chicken manure and ammonia. The flooring and bedding you choose will play a big role here. Not to mention, chicken manure is actually one of the perks of owning chickens, as it makes great fertilizer for gardens and beds.

### REQUIREMENTS:

If you have a dirt floor, then I recommend the **deep-litter method**. This method can reduce the amount of cleaning you have to do, and gives your chickens a chance to help you with composting. However, if you have a wood floor, you'll need to cover it with some sort of bedding. We personally use cheap **pine shavings** from the feed store, but you can also use **straw**. Plan on cleaning/replacing at least a portion of the bedding every couple weeks. *(If you leave it too long, you'll increase your chances of a rotting floor...)*

## Food and Water

### WHY:

Because chickens need to eat and drink.

### REQUIREMENTS:

The biggest consideration with your feeders and waterers is waste

reduction and preventing spills. Feeding your flock can be as simple as putting out a pans filled with feed and water, or as fancy as building elaborate feeders. The sky's the limit when it comes to feeder styles.



**BONUS TIP:** [Learn How to Make Homemade Chicken Feed](#)

## Electricity



### WHY:

Electricity in your coop isn't an absolute requirement but it's incredibly nice to have if you:

- ✓ Have **very cold winters** and want to have a heated water bucket
- ✓ Often do chicken chores in the dark
- ✓ Want to add supplemental light to your coop to **extend the laying season**
- ✓ Want to add **heat lamps** to your coop

### REQUIREMENTS:

We have several simple lightbulbs inside our coop, along with a number of strategically-placed outlets for heat lamps and water bowls.

**BONUS TIP:** [Learn How to Keep Chickens Warm in the Winter](#)

# MORE CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR COOP

## Rodents

Like it or not, mice are a part of country living. With all the grain laying around, and lots of places to hide, it's pretty much mouse-heaven. If you struggle with lots of rodents in the chicken coop, you may need to **consider only feeding small amounts of feed at**



**a time** (*not free-choice*) and definitely keep your extra feed tightly contained in air-tight containers (*we use large trash cans with lids*).

## Fly Control

1. **Fly Predators:** Fight the annoying bugs with **good bugs**. When you order fly predators, you'll get a lovely little baggie of predator pupae (*cocoon things*) in the mail. Let the bag sit for a few days until the tiny predators begin to hatch, then deposit them in key spots (*aka manure piles*) around your barnyard. The adult predators feast on the pupa of the annoying flies, and you get a fly relief program that doesn't require pesticides. **One caveat: chickens like to eat the predator pupae**, so try to deposit them in an area where your chickens don't have easy access.



**2. Diatomaceous Earth (DE):** DE is a fine powder made from the fossilized remains of algae, or diatoms. I use it in various applications around my barnyard, garden, and the coop as a natural pest deterrent. Sprinkle DE in and around coop bedding or in areas where chickens take their dust baths. DE works from a mechanical aspect, not a chemical one, as it tends to dry out insects and make areas less hospitable for larvae. (Wear a mask when you spread it, as it can be irritating to your lungs.)

**3. Keep it Clean:** One of the best ways to discourage flies from congregating is to remove stinky, smelly, sticky, or sweet things. This means cleaning out and freshening the coop more frequently to remove areas of wet manure (*a fly's #1 favorite substance*). The main offending areas are

underneath roosts and perches. Some folks place a board under those areas, so they can easily carry the board outside to scrape it off. I personally just make it a point to clean the bedding under the roosts more frequently, or remove the big piles. I also add fresh bedding frequently (*to reduce the smell*), turn over existing dry bedding, and sprinkle on my diatomaceous earth in the process.

**4. Fly Traps and Fly Strips:** While you can certainly use fly strips in your coop, depending on how many flies you have, you might find yourself replacing fly strips quite frequently. If that's the case, a better option is a fly trap. You can purchase fly traps (*and accompanying attractants/bait*), OR make your own *homemade fly trap* from an old plastic bottle instead.



5. **Make Essential Oil or Herbal Sprays:** As part of an overall fly control program, there are many, many herbs and essential oils that bugs just plain don't like, and mixing them into a spray is a great way to make your chicken coop even less appealing to our little buzzing friends. **An added bonus: it makes your coop smell all happy.**

**A Few Essential Oils Bugs Hate:** Rosemary, basil, dill, peppermint, spearmint, lavender, thyme, geranium, lemongrass, citronella, lemon, wild orange, etc.

**A Few Herbs Bugs Hate:** Rosemary, mint, basil, dill, lavender, thyme, bay leaves, tansy, etc.

### **BONUS TIP:** Chicken Coop Fly Repellent Recipe

- ✓ 2 cups vinegar (*how to make your own vinegar*)
- ✓ 2 cups water
- ✓ 2 tablespoons real vanilla extract (*how to make vanilla extract*)
- ✓ 40 drops of essential oil (*can be a single oil, or a combination of any of the oils listed above*)

Combine all ingredients in a spray bottle. Shake well, and spritz generously in the coop wherever flies congregate. (*For me, that's around the main door. It has a window in it and always has the most flies around it — unless I keep it sprayed down, that is.*)

## Wild Birds

Wild birds can carry disease which may be passed to your chicken flock. They will also devour your chicken feed.

For preventing wild birds, some folks suggest just keeping the coop doors closed all the time (*my hens would be furious...*) or only offering a very small amount of feed, multiple times per day, to avoid thievery from wild birds. (*I'm way too lazy to keep up with that sort of program.*)

But I found my solution in the form of... (*are you ready for this? It's pretty high-tech...*): **CDs and baling twine.**

I dug through my CD (*yes, as in compact-disc*) collection to find any old, scratched ones that no longer played. I tied a length of baling twine through the hole, and attached the other end to the ceiling of my coop, and voila!

Wild birds don't like the shiny, swaying objects hanging haphazardly from the ceiling, which is why it's a successful deterrent.

**Bonus Tip:** [Check out this post for Images of my Hanging CDs](#)



## More Chicken-Keeping Tidbits for You:



- ★ [How to Whitewash Your Chicken Coop](#)
- ★ [15 Ways to Save Money on Chicken Feed](#)
- ★ [Preparing for New Chicks](#)
- ★ [Homemade Electrolyte Recipe for Chicks](#)

## About Jill

I'm Jill Winger— a former Idaho girl who came to Wyoming to ride horses, and hasn't looked back since. I didn't grow up on a ranch, or farm, or even on acreage, but I've always had a deep-rooted obsession for the rural way of life. My handy hubby, Christian, and I purchased our 67-acre homestead in 2008, which we currently share with horses, dogs, beef cattle, dairy cattle, goats, chickens, ducks, and three wild prairie children.

Not too long after starting my own homesteading journey, I discovered I wasn't the only one dreaming about compost piles and homemade bread.

I started The Prairie Homestead with the goal of offering community, solidarity, and inspiration for other folks who are on this same path of returning to our roots in this fast-paced modern world. I just might be the [most imperfect homesteader](#) you'll ever find and I most certainly don't claim to have this whole thing figured out. But, I promise to share this crazy journey of mine as it happens-- both the good and the bad.





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