



City Chickens

By D. Maxfield, Lakewood Animal Safety & Welfare Advisory Board Member

But why? It's often the first question I'm asked when someone finds out that I raise chickens. The story that sparked my interest began about a century ago, when my great grandparents' left their home in northern Italy. After immigrating to rural Pennsylvania, my great grandpa found work in the coalmines, and used his modest earnings to purchase 14 acres of land—land that is in my family to this day. After his passing, my great grandma, Evalina Rose Caretti DiMeco, took to the egg business in order to provide for her family of seven. Raising a few thousand chickens at a time, Evelyn would wake up well before sunrise to tend to the farm, taking just one day off each year. While I never had the chance to meet my great grandma, I like to think that her story lives on through my small backyard flock (named after her and her five daughters): Evelyn, Edith, Elaine, Inez, Henrietta, and Lillian.

The benefits of raising chickens go well beyond my family ties. We live in an age where even the simplest foods—eggs, dairy, bread, etc.—can have an ingredient list that's five, ten, twenty items long. Raising your own chickens gives you direct authority over what you're actually eating, and how it's being treated. In addition to higher quality food, the quality of your backyard ecosystem can also improve:

Pest Control: chickens eat weeds, bugs (including ticks), table scraps, and other pests such as small rodents

Fertilizer: chicken manure is high in nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium—a great addition to any compost

Lawn Aerator: free-ranging chickens scratch the soil in search of food, which in turn allows air, water, and nutrients to penetrate the top layer of your yard/garden

But how? Another common question I'm used to answering—*how do you raise chickens in the city?* During the first half of the 20th century, both chicken and eggs were considered somewhat of a luxury. It wasn't until the 1950's—when production capabilities rose, labor costs declined, and refrigeration was readily available—that backyard chickens were no longer commonplace. That said, urban chickens are in no way a new phenomenon; what is new though, is the number of urban cities allowing residents to keep a limited number of backyard hens (female chickens).

In 2011, an organization by the name of *Hens in Lakewood* began hosting meetings, tours and workshops to educate Lakewood residents on the benefits of urban hen keeping. The group's persistence paid off in May of 2016, after an 18-month pilot program, when Lakewood City Council approved an amendment to LCO 23-16. The amendment allows for residents to keep a maximum of six hens (after completing all necessary prerequisites), and is capped at fifty permits.

Prerequisites? In order to keep backyard hens, you are required to submit the following materials to the mayor's office at Lakewood City Hall (12650 Detroit Avenue, Lakewood, OH 44107):

- Application (completed and signed)
- \$25.00 Permit Fee (cash or check)
- Backyard Hen Training Certificate
- Coop & Run Specifications
- Landlord Approval (if renting)

Visit www.onelakewood.com/backyard-hens/ for detailed information regarding these materials.

What's next? Applications should be submitted to the Director of Public Safety in the Mayor's Office on the 2nd floor of City Hall, and will be processed on a first-come, first-serve basis. You can expect to hear back from the mayor's office within a few days. Upon approval, new applicants must contact Lakewood Animal Control to schedule a location inspection. Once approved, you may begin construction of your coop/run. Upon completion, you must contact an Animal Control Officer (ACO) for final review, and then will be issued a permit. **Note:** Renewal applicants are required to submit a \$25 fee, and contact an ACO for an annual inspection.

Tips: Planning your coop/run is one of the most important aspects when preparing for chickens—especially in an urban environment where they will most likely spend the majority of their time confined to this area. Following the tips below will help ensure happier, healthier hens:

Spacing: Whether you purchase a premade coop or build your own, make sure you allow ample space for the number of birds you plan on raising; according to the ordinance, the combined area of the coop and run shall allow at least three square feet per hen, however the more space the better.



Location: It's best to place your coop in a location that receives partial shade & partial sun—this allows your chickens to escape the heat during the summer months, and bask in the sun when the temperature drops. If your yard receives full sun, consider a raised coop—this will maximize your run space, and provide adequate, covered shelter.

Elevation: It's advisable to place your coop in a slightly raised location with sufficient drainage. Even covered runs get messy in wet weather—limiting the variables will help keep your chickens clean, and more importantly, dry.

Accessibility: Everyone has different needs, and it's important to prioritize these when building/purchasing a coop. A few things to consider: an external nesting box eases egg collection, complete and comfortable access to the coop/run aids in biannual deep cleaning, hanging food and water maximizes ground space while limiting mess, and a poop board/hammock under the roost makes manure collection and composting a breeze.

Safety: In order to predator proof your coop, you must address the structure from all angles. Potential predators can burrow under (rodents, skunks, opossums, etc.), break through (raccoons, coyote, dogs, etc.), or attack from above (hawks and other birds of prey). While chicken wire can be a deterrent, half inch galvanized hardware cloth is much superior. It's important to bury the hardware cloth approximately twelve inches around the perimeter of your structure, enclose all windows/vents, and cover the top of the enclosure.

Aesthetics: While there are no requirements regarding the look of your coop, it doesn't hurt to consider the following when ideating your design: does your house have distinguishing features that could be replicated in the coop (shake/slat siding, paint/trim color, etc.), and do you plan on landscaping around your coop (what plants are safe for chickens, what plants will chickens avoid, etc.).

Inspection: An easy way to prepare for the initial inspection is to place wooden stakes in the four corners of your desired coop/run location (assuming it is a square or rectangle), and wrap string around the perimeter; by doing this in advance, you will have time to investigate the amount of sunlight that particular area receives.

Once an animal control officer approves the location and dimensions of your intended coop and enclosed run, you are free to begin building/installing. Upon completion (this includes the installation of all doors, windows, and accompanying locks), you are required to contact animal control for a final inspection. After an officer has concluded that your structure abides by all rules and regulations under LCO 23-16, you will be awarded a hen-keeping permit.

Questions? Whether you're considering keeping backyard hens, or simply interested in learning more, the following sources provide valuable information that go beyond obtaining a permit:

- *Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens* by Gail Damerow
- *Hens in Lakewood* facebook page (www.facebook.com/LakewoodOhioHens)
- *The Chicken Chick* facebook page (www.facebook.com/TheChickenChick)
- *Fresh Eggs Daily* blog (www.fresheggdaily.com)
- *Backyard Chickens* forum (www.backyardchickens.com)
- Attend a backyard hen training certificate program put on by the Cleveland Metroparks or OSU Cuyahoga County Extension