

Backyard Chicken Quick Reference

Every figure sourced from university extension guidance · Last reviewed July 2026 · poultrycalc.com

Space per bird

Bird type	Coop floor	Run	Roost
Standard breeds	4 sq ft	10 sq ft	10 in
Bantams	2 sq ft	8 sq ft	8 in
Heavy breeds	6 sq ft	10 sq ft	12 in

Coop figures assume birds also have run access. Free-ranging flocks still need the full coop, roost, and nest-box numbers — only the run requirement disappears. Floor space means usable floor: don't count feeder footprints or space under nest boxes mounted lower than 18 in.

Nesting boxes

1 box per 4 hens, rounded up · **12 × 12 × 12 in** each. More boxes won't help — hens queue for the same favourite one. Mount roosts higher than the boxes or the flock will sleep (and poop) in them.

Feed & water

	Per bird, per day
Layer feed	0.25 lb (~110 g)
Water — mild weather	0.5 L (about 1 pint)
Water — hot weather (85–95°F+)	1 L (about 1 quart)

A 50 lb bag feeds one hen roughly 200 days. Water figures size a waterer — always provide more than the minimum, and never let it run dry in heat.

Brooder temperature

Chick age	Target temp at chick level
Week 1	95°F
Week 2	90°F
Week 3	85°F
Week 4	80°F
Week 5	75°F
Week 6	70°F
Week 7+	Ambient — off heat once fully feathered

Start at 95°F, drop 5°F per week. Read the chicks, not the thermometer: huddled under the lamp = too cold; pressed to the far corners = too hot; spread out evenly = just right.

Incubation

Species	Days to hatch	Candle on day	Lockdown day
Chicken	21	7, 14	18
Duck	28	7, 14, 21	25
Quail (Coturnix)	17	7, 12	14
Turkey	28	7, 14, 21	25
Goose	33	7, 14, 25	30

Lockdown is always the last 3 days: stop turning, raise humidity to 65–70%, and keep the lid shut — every peek costs you the humidity the hatch depends on. Real hatches spread a day either side; temperature is usually why.

Never feed these

Chocolate, avocado, onions, rhubarb — plus anything mouldy, alcoholic, caffeinated, or heavily salted.

Avocado (persin) and chocolate (theobromine) can kill a bird outright. Onions cause anemia in any real quantity. Rhubarb leaves carry toxic levels of oxalic acid.

Cook first — toxic raw

Potatoes, dried or raw beans. Raw/green/sprouted potato and peels contain solanine; raw and dried beans contain phytohaemagglutinin. Thorough cooking destroys both.

Safe to feed

Tomatoes, watermelon, strawberries, blueberries, apples, cherries, lettuce, kale, broccoli, carrots, cucumber, pumpkin, cabbage, sweet potatoes, rice, oats, popcorn, corn, mealworms, eggs.

In moderation only

Bananas, grapes, oranges, spinach, bread, cheese.

The 90/10 rule: at least 90% of what a hen eats should be balanced layer feed; treats and scraps cap at about 10%. Feed carries the protein and calcium eggshells are built from — treats dilute it. Chickens have no teeth: a confined flock needs insoluble grit available to digest anything other than feed.

Sources

Virginia Cooperative Extension, *Small-Scale Poultry Housing* (2902-1092) · Colorado State University Extension, *Brooding and Space Requirements for Poultry* (2.502) · University of Minnesota Extension, *Raising Chickens for Eggs* · Mississippi State University Extension, *Incubation Duration Periods* · Alabama Cooperative Extension System, *Feeding the Laying Hen* · Penn State Extension, *Brooding of Domestic Fowl* · University of Florida IFAS Extension, *Raising Backyard Chickens for Eggs* (AN239) · Merck Veterinary Manual, poultry section.

Planning guidance, not veterinary advice. Space figures are extension minimums for healthy flocks — your climate, breeds, and local ordinances may require more. When a bird is sick, call a vet, not a calculator. Free to print and share · poultrycalc.com