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## **Considerations Before Buying Chickens**

The rising price of eggs has many people thinking about getting a few chickens. If this thought has also crossed your mind here are a few things to consider in your decision-making process.

In addition to the cost of buying the chickens, there is the cost of building a coop/pen for them, buying feeders and waterers, plus the monthly cost of feed. Before you start building a coop, if you live in town, check the zoning restrictions to see if it is allowed to have chickens in town.

Many towns allow homeowners to have a couple of hens (female chickens). However, roosters (male chickens) are usually not allowed because they are much louder and neighbors may not appreciate their morning wake-up call. When deciding on a coop/pen design, make sure to go with one that will provide shelter from the cold weather and protect them from predators.

When it comes to getting chickens, there are a few different places you can get them. Many local farm stores sell chicks in the spring, chicks can be ordered from a hatchery, or you can buy chickens from a local producer. When buying chicks, you can purchase straight-run chicks or pullets. Straight-run chicks haven't been sexed and there is a 50/50 chance of getting hens or roosters. Pullet chicks are hens (or should be, there is not a 100 percent guarantee). There are many different breeds of chickens; these different breeds have been developed for specific purposes. While all hens lay eggs, breeds that are known as "layers" have been bred for increased egg production. Before purchasing chickens, spend some time researching different breeds to decide which one is right for you.

Keep in mind when getting chicks that hens won't start laying until they are four to six months old. Once mature, hens will lay an egg every 24-26 hours. Egg production will decrease in the winter when there are fewer hours of daylight as 16 hours of light is needed for maximum egg production. Although hens live to be six to eight years old, egg production starts to decrease when the hens are around four years old.

When calculating how much it costs to raise chickens, on average a standard sized chicken will consume a quarter pound of feed a day. Usually, the chicken feed will come in a 50 lb. bag, and a bag of feed will last a dozen chickens for about two weeks. A bag of feed costs \$15.00-20.00 depending on what type of feed you buy, figuring on the higher end of feed costs, it will cost \$40.00 a month to feed a dozen chickens. While owning chickens may or may not save any money, they can be enjoyable to own and there is the opportunity the share extra eggs with family and friends or sell them.

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