



Live Farm Fresh, Without the Farm

Living Homegrown Podcast Episode #08 Q&A Episode: Backyard Chicken Keeping

Show Notes: www.LivingHomegrown.com/08

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Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh, without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavourful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hi everyone and welcome to another episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. This series is about living farm fresh without farm and that's through artisan food crafts like canning and fermenting and through growing your own organic food even if you have little or no garden space.

I am Theresa Loe, the founder of the online Canning Academy. And I am the canning expert and co-executive producer on the national gardening television series: Growing A Greener World on PBS.

Now if you want to learn more about this podcast series or my background, you can check out episode 00 of the podcast or you can just visit my website LivingHomegrown.com.

Today is a Q & A episode with a listener question and it's all about backyard chicken keeping. So the question today is from Tim, and he says...

Tim: My wife and I live in a small town near San Francisco. We are interested in have a few backyard chickens but as you know, in California our houses are very close together. Since you have had backyard chickens

for many years, do you have any tips for keeping our neighbors from freaking out?

Theresa: [laughs] Yes Tim, I have some great tips for keeping your neighbors from freaking out. I have been homesteading on less than 1/10th of an acre here in Los Angeles for a really long time and I added backyard chickens to my homestead about 8 years ago.

So there is definitely some considerations you need to think about before you start and I'll talk about those as well as things you can do to keep your neighbors under control.

- 1) First of all, I just want to make sure you think this through really carefully because having backyard chickens is a really big responsibility that you don't want to take lightly. These are living creatures that you're going to be bringing into your backyard and it's just like getting a dog or a cat or any animal, you want to have a plan for things like if you go on vacation or if it gets sick or what if the bird gets injured. All of those things you need to think through and have a plan in place for whatever you're comfortable with.

Now I'm sure you've thought about those things but I just wanted to make sure because a lot of times people jump into getting baby chicks without thinking through the fact of how many eggs they're going to get and how they're going to handle the logistics of taking care of them if they want to take a trip. So think all of that through before you get started.

- 2) The second thing that you really need to consider is what are the city laws or ordinances that you have within your particular city. Every city is different so I recommend that you go down to city hall and ask. It's as simple as that. In my town, we are allowed to have up to 5 chickens and no roosters. So you want to know ahead of time what your laws and rules are so that you won't have problem with your neighbors because you're breaking the laws. You'll already know ahead of time if

you're within the boundaries of what is allowed in your area.

- 3) The third thing I would recommend is that you have a rooster plan. And what I mean by that is you want to have an idea of what will happen if you get roosters in the group of chicks that you get. I'm assuming that you're going to be getting baby chicks so you won't know ahead of time if they're male or female.

And yes you can request you only get hens, but it's not an exact science when they sex the chickens when they check them when they're first born so you may end up having a rooster or two. And you need to have a plan for that.

Most cities do not allow you to have roosters and that's because they make a heck of a lot of noise. People think oh well they just cock-a-doodle-doo in the morning. Actually no, they cock-a-doodle-doo or crow all day long. Every day. Some days they even crow before the sun comes up and they crow constantly.

The other thing is if you have more than one rooster in a small space, they are going to fight. So even if you live in an area where you could have a rooster, if you end up with more than one, you could have a problem. So with all of that it's just imperative that you be responsible and have a plan in place for if you get one or more roosters in your batch of chicks.

And that means that you should have another home set up or a place that you would be able to take that rooster if you needed to. Now in my case, I had a friend who had a farmstead and she actually wanted a rooster. I was starting with some very speciality chickens, some very usual chickens, so she was thrilled at the chance to get an unusual rooster to add to her flock so that she could breed her chickens and have some different kinds of chickens.

And it turns out I did get a rooster, it was a silky, and she couldn't have been happier to get that rooster. But that's usually not the case. You usually have a lot of trouble finding a home for a rooster and you need

to have a plan that you feel comfortable with.

You also have to realize that some people will eat the roosters so if you're not comfortable with that I would not recommend using something like craigslist to get rid of them unless you are totally comfortable with whatever someone's going to do when you give that rooster away. It's really something to think about. Most people don't and they end up in a panic with a rooster that's disturbing the neighbors, they are breaking the law, and they do something crazy like release that chicken in the wild saying oh it will survive on its own. No it won't. It won't survive in the wild on its own. So you really need to have a plan to think about what you will do if you get one, two, three or even four roosters. Believe me, it happens! So have a plan.

- 4) Also, you should know that the hens can also make a lot of noise. And this can be a problem if you have a very close proximity with your neighbors. They squawk, especially when they lay an egg. And it's funny one will get started and then they all start and they just go on and on and on and they all make a little bit different sound. It's almost like they're singing.

My neighbours don't mind. We live very close to the airport so the chicken noises are actually not as disturbing as the jets that are taking off and I've never had a problem. But some people are bothered by the chickens so you will want to alert your neighbors that they're going to hear some noises from the chickens that you have.

- 5) And that brings me to number 5 which is talk to your neighbors ahead of time. Let them know that you're going to be getting chickens. Give them your cell number. Ask them to call you if they have any problems rather than reporting a complaint to city hall or to the animal control agency. It is much better that they deal with you directly. If you give them your cell number and let them know that you want to talk to them if there's a problem so that you can head it off at the pass that is the way to go.

I even know of some people who will tell their neighbors, "Listen, I

know you may not want to call me and let me know that there's a problem but just leave a note, an anonymous note and let me know that there's a problem. That way if you don't want to talk to me and I will handle it." And that's really important because you wind up with one hen that maybe is very loud and is really that one hen is really the only problem that you have. You get a complaint and maybe you can get a new home for that one hen and still keep the rest of your chickens.

- 6) The next thing I would advise is that you should be prepared to share your eggs with your neighbors. There is nothing better than farm fresh eggs and if you regularly give eggs to your neighbors they are less likely to complain about the fact that you have chickens. Your egg production will work kind of like this.

Depending on the breed, you will start getting about one egg a day from your chickens once they reach maturity. And they reach maturity at around 6 to 7 months old. Some breeds lay a little bit more than others so it all just depends on what breeds you end up picking. But they will continue laying eggs through spring and summer and then it starts to drop off. Their egg production starts to drop off during the winter months when the days get shorter. A lot of people don't realize that a hen ovulates or makes an egg based on the length of day, or the amount of light that is detected by their eyes. So when the days get shorter, her egg production slows down or she will stop laying altogether. And then when the days get longer again and you start getting into the warmer weather she starts up laying again. But it's all based on the length of the daylight.

Now in commercial operations they avoid this problem of egg production going down by having artificial light in the chicken coop or where the chickens are laying eggs. They make the chickens believe that the days are longer. So when you have chickens, unless you put an artificial light in your coop, I know some people do. I do not, I let my chickens have a rest. But if you don't put an artificial light in your coop they will stop laying or have a very, very reduced egg production during the winter months.

So if you're going to have let's say 3 or 4 chickens for the first couple years you could be getting an egg a day from each chicken or 4 eggs a day if they are heavy layers. Those eggs can add up! So giving them away during the spring and summer months is not difficult to do.

Also, you should know that as a chicken ages, her egg production slows way down and eventually stops. They're at their peak of production for the first couple years of their life. And then it starts to slow down and she could stop laying altogether anytime after 6 years old. But she doesn't just die at that point. She's going to live for many years and a chicken can live in your backyard for anywhere from 8 to 12 years so you want to keep that in mind when you're picking out those cute little chicks. After 4, 5, 6 years you may not be getting very many eggs from those chickens yet they're still alive and going strong in your backyard.

Now in my situation I have a couple of chickens that are 7 years old and I only get about 1 egg per week from those chickens. But I would never get rid of them even if they weren't laying eggs at all. They're family pets in my household. However, this is something to take into consideration if you're only allowed to have say 3 or 4 chickens in your city and they all become older at the same time and are not laying anymore you want to think this through.

I know what some people do is they start out with just a few chickens and then a couple years later they add a few chickens more into the flock and eventually they have all different age groups in their flock so that they always have eggs in production.

So that kind of brings me to how many chickens should you have? And that really depends on how much space you have in your backyard. But I would really recommend that you if possible have a minimum of 3 chickens. And that's really because they are social animals. One chicken all by herself is never going to be a happy chicken. She would



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be most happy with at least 2 and the reason we recommend 3 is because in case something happens to one of those chickens.

So Tim, I think you can see there are a lot of things to think about when you're starting down the road of having backyard chickens. But I love that you were starting out with considering how your neighbors would feel about it. And I think that makes you a really great and considerate neighbour and that just solidifies that you're also going to be a great backyard chicken keeper.

I have a lot more information for you on my website in the show notes for this episode. So just go to LivingHomegrown.com/08 and I'm going to have links for more articles that you can read about backyard chicken keeping. And I will also have some book recommendations for you.

Thank you so much for asking the question Tim, and if you have any more questions, be sure to let me know. And thank you to everyone else for joining me here today. Until next time, I hope you're all able to live just a little bit more local, seasonal and homegrown.

Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown podcast. Visit LivingHomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh, without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown podcast.

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