

Chicken

Gallus gallus domesticus

 Poule  Haushuhn



REGULATIONS

Domestic livestock/pet

OPAn: minimum standards (space, perches, light, litter); group housing. Registration/reporting may apply for flocks. Cantonal/municipal rules for roosters and nuisance.



LIFESPAN

5–10 years



ADULT WEIGHT

1.5–4 kg



ADULT SIZE

30–70 cm



LIFESTYLE

Diurnal, ground-dwelling flock animal



BODY TEMPERATURE

40.5–42.5 °C



SEXUAL MATURITY

5–7 months



INCUBATION

21–21 days



LITTER / CLUTCH SIZE

Up to 28 eggs/month in good layers; strong seasonality in rustic breeds.



Habitat & environment



Type — Enclosed coop + outdoor run. Non-porous materials (easy to clean/disinfect); ventilation without drafts; insulation against humidity and temperature extremes. Sheltered from prevailing winds, away from kitchens and drafts.



Substrate — Straw, hay, non-resinous shavings or hemp. Dry, low-dust, renewed regularly. Washable mats (Drybed®, vinyl) in the sleeping area can reduce dust.



Exercise — Daily access to an outdoor run, ideally divided into multiple rotating zones to preserve vegetation. Avoid tall grass (crop impaction risk) and standing water.



Equipment

- Untreated natural-wood perches (Ø 4–5 cm, rounded), 18–20 cm linear per hen, 50–80 cm off the ground, spaced 30 cm apart
- Dark, quiet nesting boxes: 1 for 4–5 hens; about 30×30×35 cm, clean straw/hay
- Anti-waste feeders (linear or hopper) at back height
- Clean drinkers (changed daily) at multiple points; heated in winter
- Free-choice calcium source (crushed oyster shells, cuttlebone)
- Bowl/box of grit/gastroliths (small pebbles) for the gizzard
- Dust bath (fine dry sand, soil, sieved wood ash)
- Automatic pop-door (e.g. ChickenGuard®)
- High ventilation vent (removes ammonia and moisture) without direct drafts



To avoid

- Smooth plastic or cold metal perches (slippery, footpad problems, frostbite)
- Sandpaper-covered perches
- Resinous shavings (pine, fir) in large amounts (airway irritation)
- Barbecue ash (chemical residues) in the dust bath

- Scented products/aerosols in the coop
- PTFE non-stick cookware in adjacent kitchen
- Accessible electric cables in the run
- Floor heat plates (burn risk)

Technical parameters

 Ambient	5-25 °C Tolerates 5-25 °C; caution > 28 °C (heatstroke) and < 0 °C with humidity (comb/wattle frostbite).
 Humidity	50-70 % Well-ventilated coop; avoid > 75 % (mould, aspergillosis) and < 40 % (dust).

Lighting

 **Photoperiod** — Natural light. 14-16 h photoperiod for continuous laying; in winter natural reduction to 8-10 h. Optional artificial supplement (timer) for 12-14 h, balanced with rest.

 **UVB need** — Beneficial (vitamin D synthesis, eggshell quality); natural sun access usually sufficient

 **Lamp type** — Bird-specific UV lamp only if the coop is indoors without sun access

 **Recommended brands** — Arcadia Bird Lamp · Zoo Med AvianSun

 **Replacement** — Yearly

 UVB does not pass through glass or plexiglass. Place the lamp inside the terrarium, under a protective grille.

Environmental hazards & toxins

Heavy metals  Lead ·  Zinc

Fumes & gases  Teflon / PTFE ·  Carbon monoxide ·  Mycotoxins (moulds) ·  Botulism (Clostridium botulinum)

Chemicals  Rodenticides ·  Slug bait (metaldehyde) ·  Fipronil ·  Household insecticides ·  Herbicides & chemical fertilisers ·  Hydrocarbons & solvents ·  Salt & salty water ·  Household cleaners ·  Mothballs (naphthalene, paradichlorobenzene) ·  Paints, varnishes, polyurethane

Appliances & equipment  Electric cables

Plants  Lily ·  Oleander ·  Yew ·  Lily of the valley ·  Oak (acorns and leaves) ·  Foxglove ·  Rhododendron / azalea ·  Kalanchoe ·  Lantana ·  Rhubarb leaves ·  Cherry laurel & Prunus species ·  Castor bean (Ricinus communis) ·  Datura & deadly nightshade ·  Hemlock ·  Hydrangea ·  Red maple (wilted leaves)

Behaviour

Highly social and expressive animal. Strict flock hierarchy (pecking order) established by brief confrontations; group changes must be gradual. Active in early morning and late afternoon; siesta/dust bath at midday. Varied vocalisations (laying song, alarm call, contentment cluck).

 **Social life** — Strictly gregarious: keep at least 3 hens (ideally 5+) for stable social dynamics. Rooster/hen mix: 1 rooster per 8-10 hens (risk of exhausting hens if fewer). Introduce new hens in stages (1-week visual separation, brief supervised contact, then night-time integration on the perch). Avoid overcrowding (triggers pecking and cannibalism).

 **Activity cycle** — Diurnal with two activity peaks (morning and late afternoon). Midday rest often spent dust-bathing. Roost up at dusk (strong instinct).

 **Sleep & rest** — 10-12 h of uninterrupted sleep on the perch, in darkness and quiet. The circadian rhythm drives laying; chronic sleep deprivation reduces production and favours metabolic disorders.

Foraging

Enrichment

- Rotating outdoor runs (preserves vegetation)
- Permanent dust bath (sand/soil/ash)
- Daily foraging (grain in straw, hanging vegetables)
- Branches/perches at varied heights
- Mirror/reflective object for a lonely hen (transition only)

Foraging — Techniques

- Scatter cereals in the coop straw rather than in the feeder
- Hang whole cabbages/vegetables at beak height (effort + occupation)

Essential natural behaviour: a hen spends a large part of her day scratching, pecking and turning the substrate in search of insects, seeds and greens. Without enough foraging, plucking, cannibalism and obesity appear.

 **Time in the wild** — Several hours a day in wild/semi-wild conditions

- Foraging cubes/balls with treats inside
- Hollow logs filled with seeds
- Leaf litter/shavings piles in the run for scratching
- Rotate the run to keep interest fresh (insects, worms, fresh roots)

Nutrition

Omnivore diet: 65 % cereals (prefer cracked; avoid all-pellet), 25 % protein (insects, legumes, animal complement in winter), 10 % vitamin-A-rich vegetables/fruit. Free-choice calcium and grit are essential.

Daily base

Barley

Concassée; base.

Wheat

Concassé; base.

Oat

Concassée; base.

Spelt

Concassé; base.

Corn

Concassé; énergétique, à modérer (apport calorifique élevé).

Fava Bean

Source protéique végétale.

Pea

Source protéique végétale.

Soy

Source protéique végétale; à toaster ou intégrer dans un mélange du commerce.

Lentil

Source protéique végétale.

Mealworm

Protéine animale; en libre distribution modérée.

Earthworm

Protéine animale; naturelle au parcours.

Tuna

En hiver, en petite quantité, mélangé au riz.

Rice

Riz complet cuit; vecteur pour protéines animales en hiver.

Flax Seed

Oléagineuse en petite quantité; améliore le plumage et les œufs.

Rapeseed

Oléagineuse en petite quantité.

Vegetables & greens · 10 %

10 % of the ration. Favour vitamin-A-rich dark leafy greens (dandelion, watercress, spinach, romaine, turnip greens). Chop finely. No seasoning or added fats.

Watercress

Vit A

Très riche en vitamine A.

Dandelion

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A et calcium.

Spinach

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A; à varier (oxalates).

Swiss Chard

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Lollo Rossa Lettuce

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Romaine Lettuce

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Lamb's Lettuce

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Kale

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A et calcium.

Celery

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Fennel

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Turnip Greens

Vit A

Riche en vitamine A.

Endive

Vit A

Curly Endive

Vit A

Escarole

Vit A

Batavia Lettuce

Vit A

Oak Leaf Lettuce

Broccoli

Bok Choy

Arugula

Vit A

Green Bean

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Pellets & supplements

Recommended brands : Country's Best (Versele-Laga) · Hipro · Granovita · UFA Hobby

Commercial compound feed (pellets/mash) acceptable as a base if cracked cereals are hard to source. Choose layer feed 16–18 % protein, enriched with calcium/vitamins.

Pellets

Aliment pouleuse complet, riche en calcium.

★ Treats (occasional)

Occasional treats: oilseeds (flax, rapeseed), small unseasoned table scraps, very small amounts of sweet fruit. No bread (gluten), no sweets, no salt.

Flax Seed

Pumpkin Seed

Rapeseed



Yogurt

Nature, sans sucre; petite quantité (probiotiques).



Hydration

Fresh water ad libitum, changed daily; at multiple points in the coop and run. Heated drinkers or frequent changes in winter to prevent freezing. A hen drinks 200–500 mL/day depending on heat.



Vitamin A

Vitamin A is essential for mucous membranes, skin, feathers, vision and egg quality. Deficiency causes squamous metaplasia: abscesses, granulomas, nasal discharge, periocular swelling, dyspnea, dull plumage, anorexia and drop in laying. Sources: dark leafy greens (watercress, dandelion, romaine, spinach), apricot, mango, papaya, melon.



Diet transition

When switching from an all-seed or all-pellet diet to a balanced 65/25/10 ration, proceed gradually.

Duration : At least 1–2 weeks.

Steps :

1. Gradually reduce the old feed (25 % less every 3–4 days).
2. Introduce new cracked cereals and protein sources (worms, legumes) in increasing amounts.
3. Add freshly cut greens in two daily portions.
4. Monitor droppings consistency and laying regularity.

Tips :

- Sprinkle some of the new feed onto the old to introduce the taste.
- Spread the food as foraging (on the ground, in straw) rather than in the feeder to spark interest.
- Keep calcium and grit free-choice throughout the transition.



Warnings :

- No abrupt switch — risk of laying drop and weight loss.
- Monitor weight and egg production; consult a vet if drop > 30 % in 1 week.
- Avoid introducing several new foods at the same time (makes intolerance diagnosis difficult).



FREQUENCY

- 2 meals/day (morning + afternoon) in an amount eaten within 15–20 min
- Calcium and grit permanently free-choice
- Fresh water available at all times
- Greens served freshly cut, remove leftovers at the end of the day



TO AVOID

Toxic or clearly unsuitable foods. Seasoned/salted/fatty table scraps and white bread should not be daily fare.



Avocado

Persine — cardiotoxique, mortel.



Rhubarb

Acide oxalique.



Apple Seeds

Cyanure (pépins de pomme, noyaux de pêche, cerise, prune).



Onion

Anémie hémolytique.



Garlic

À fortes doses : anémie hémolytique.



Potato

Crue ou germée : solanine toxique.



Chocolate

Théobromine — cardiotoxique.



Sunflower Seed

Trop grasse; risque obésité et stéatose.



Bread

Pain blanc/moisi : risque de jabot et carences.



Sweets

Sucres et xylitol toxiques.



Fatty meat

Stéatose hépatique.



Health & prevention



Preventive medicine

Annual clinical exam (weight, plumage, comb, oral cavity, crop, abdomen). Faecal exam 1–2×/year for internal parasites (capillaria, roundworms, coccidia). Regular checks for red mites (*Dermanyssus gallinae*) at the base of perches and in coop cracks — environmental treatment with diatomaceous earth or juniper tar. At least 1 month quarantine for new arrivals. Weekly coop disinfection (vinegar, black soap, baking soda). Quarterly weighing.



WARNING SIGNS

- Drop or stop in laying out of season (> 1 week)
- Persistently ruffled feathers, hunched posture
- Loss of appetite, weight loss
- Diarrhoea, abnormal droppings (blood, visible worms, unusual colours)
- Breathing difficulties (open beak, nasal/eye discharge)

Vaccination

In Switzerland, no mandatory vaccination for hobby keeping. In commercial breeding: Marek's disease vaccine in chicks, and depending on context: Newcastle disease, infectious bronchitis, coccidiosis. Discuss schedule with a vet.

Surgery & neutering

Common procedures: ovariectomy (excessive egg production, salpingitis, ovarian tumours — very common in older hens), mass excision, wound debridement (pecking, predators), cloacal prolapse correction, crop care (emptying/flushing for impaction). Hormonal sterilisation by implant available (effective 6 months to 1.5 years).

Common conditions

Red mites (*Dermanyssus gallinae*)

SYMPTOMS Anemia, drop in laying, night-time restlessness, ruffled feathers, possible chick mortality; mites visible around perches at dusk

CAUSE Ubiquitous ectoparasite; introduced by wild birds, equipment or new hens

PREVENTION Regular inspections (under perches, in cracks); environmental treatment (diatomaceous earth, juniper tar); weekly disinfection; never reuse equipment without thorough cleaning

Coccidiosis

SYMPTOMS Often bloody diarrhoea, lethargy, weight loss, dull plumage; especially in young birds (3–8 weeks)

CAUSE Ground protozoa (*Eimeria* spp.); favoured by humidity and stocking density

PREVENTION Dry litter, low stocking density, clean water, regular faecal exams, run rotation; chick vaccination available in commercial breeding

Marek's disease

SYMPTOMS Progressive paralysis (legs, wings), weight loss, internal tumours, mortality; not curable

CAUSE Avian herpesvirus type 2; highly contagious via dust and feathers

PREVENTION Day-one vaccination (commercial hatcheries); buy certified chicks/hens; quarantine; never introduce birds of unknown origin

- Lameness, swelling of leg or crop
- Pale, purple or scaly comb (anemia, frostbite, parasites)
- Intense self- or flock-pecking, pulled feathers
- Soft-shelled, misshapen or shell-less eggs (calcium deficiency, salpingitis)
- Cloacal prolapse (veterinary emergency)

If any of these symptoms appear, prompt veterinary care is essential.
Contact an exotic-pet vet as soon as possible.

Oviduct diseases (salpingitis, yolk peritonitis, ovarian tumours)

SYMPTOMS Distended abdomen, penguin-like gait, anorexia, drop/stop in laying, shell-less eggs, prostration; very common after 3 years

CAUSE Selectively-bred over-production of eggs in hybrids; ageing of the reproductive tract

PREVENTION Hormonal sterilisation (deslorelin implant, 6 months–1.5 years) or surgery in pet hens; avoid ultra-high-production breeds if welfare is the priority

Vitamin A deficiency

SYMPTOMS Oral abscesses and granulomas, nasal discharge, periocular swelling, dyspnea, dull plumage, drop in laying, altered shell quality

CAUSE Unbalanced diet (too many cereals, not enough dark leafy greens)

PREVENTION 10 % of the ration as vitamin-A-rich greens; sun and run access; supplement in winter if needed

Crop impaction

SYMPTOMS Persistently firm, distended crop, anorexia, weight loss, dehydration, foul breath; life-threatening if untreated

CAUSE Ingestion of long fibrous grass, foreign body, lack of grit, parasites

PREVENTION Keep run grass short, free-choice grit, no accessible thread/plastic, faecal exams

Scaly leg mite (*Cnemidocoptes mutans*)

SYMPTOMS Raised, crusty, whitish scales on the legs; lameness, deformities long-term

CAUSE Subcutaneous mite; direct transmission or via equipment

PREVENTION Regular inspection, antiparasitic treatment (vet), environmental disinfection

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