

Backyard Chickens — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a real plan for your yard. Each section pairs with a course module and gives you sizing calculators, breed comparisons, predator-proofing audits, brooding logs, and daily health checks to use with your own flock. Work through it before you buy a single chick, and keep the templates open as you build so your coop and flock start from correct numbers instead of guesses.

Planning Your Flock: Goals, Breeds, and Bylaws

Settle your goal, size the flock to your egg demand, shortlist real breeds, and confirm you are legally allowed to keep them.

Worksheet: Goal and Flock-Size Calculator

Decide what you want from chickens and size the flock to match before looking at coops. Estimate your weekly egg use, then use the rule of about one hen per egg per week to land on a starting flock number, keeping at least three birds.

Primary goal (eggs / meat / dual-purpose / pets)

Eggs used by household per week

Eggs per hen per week in peak lay (about 5 to 6)

Calculated hens needed (eggs needed divided by eggs per hen)

Planned starting flock size (minimum 3)

Start from chicks or pullets?

Who does daily chores, and the absence/sitter plan

Exercise: Shortlist Three Breeds for Your Conditions

Using the course breed guide, pick three breeds that fit your goal and climate and could make up your first flock. Research each one's egg output, cold or heat tolerance, and temperament, then justify why the mix works for you.

- Which breed is your reliable workhorse layer, and roughly how many eggs per year does it give?

- Is your climate cold or hot, and which comb type and breed weight suit it best?

- If children will help, which calm breed did you include, and which flighty breeds did you rule out?

Checklist: Bylaw and Legality Check (Do This First)

- Found the municipal bylaw on hens or backyard poultry
- Confirmed the maximum number of birds allowed
- Confirmed whether roosters are permitted (usually not)
- Noted any required permit, license, or fee
- Recorded coop setback distance from property lines and dwellings
- Checked lot-size minimum and any coop screening or manure rules
- Got written HOA or landlord permission if applicable

Housing: Coop Design and Predator-Proofing

Size the coop and run from the per-bird standards, plan ventilation and bedding, and audit every predator weak point.

Worksheet: Coop and Run Sizing Sheet

Calculate the minimum coop and run dimensions for your planned flock using the course standards. Fill in your flock size and the per-bird figures, then compute the floor areas and the perch, nest-box, and feeder needs. Use the sizing template to check any coop you are considering buying.

Number of standard hens

Coop floor per hen (sq ft, use 3 to 4)

Total coop floor required (sq ft)

Run space per hen (sq ft, use 8 to 10)

Total run area required (sq ft)

Perch length needed (hens times 8 to 12 in)

Nest boxes needed (one per 3 to 4 hens)

Exercise: Ventilation and Bedding Plan

Plan how your coop will stay dry and fresh year-round. Mark where high vents will sit relative to the roosts, choose a bedding material and cleaning method, and decide your winter and summer climate tactics.

- Where are your high vents placed so moist air escapes above the roosting birds without drafting them?

- Which bedding will you use, and will you clean weekly or run the deep-litter method?

- What is your plan to keep water unfrozen in winter and to provide shade and cooling in summer?

Checklist: Predator-Proofing Audit (Walk the Coop)

- Every window, vent, and run panel covered in half-inch hardware cloth, screwed with washers
- No gap anywhere larger than half an inch (weasel and rat test)
- Digging defense in place: buried L-footer or 18 to 24 inch ground apron
- Raccoon-proof latches on all doors: two-step, spring-loaded, or padlocked
- Open run top covered with netting or wire against hawks and owls
- Feed stored in a sealed metal bin, not an open bag
- Pop door closed and latched every night (automatic door installed if possible)

Worksheet: Coop Build or Buy Budget

Plan the cost of housing before you commit, since the coop is the biggest expense. List each component, its cost, and whether you will build or buy it, then total the project so you know the true up-front investment.
Coop structure (build or buy) cost

Run framing and hardware cloth cost

Latches, hinges, and automatic door cost

Feeders and waterers cost

Bedding and initial supplies cost

Total up-front housing cost

Daily Care: Feed, Water, and Brooding Chicks

Plan feed and water capacity, match the ration to each life stage, and run the brooder temperature ramp correctly.

Worksheet: Feed and Water Capacity Planner

Size your feeders and waterers so the flock never runs short. Using about 0.5 liter of water and roughly 100 to 150 grams of feed per hen per day, calculate daily totals and how long each container will last before a refill.

Number of hens

Water per hen per day (about 0.5 L)

Total daily water need (L)

Feed per hen per day (about 100 to 150 g)

Total daily feed need (g)

Waterer capacity (L) and days it lasts

Feeder capacity (g) and days it lasts

Exercise: Match the Ration to the Life Stage

For each life stage, write the correct feed type, target protein, and calcium note from the course. Pay special attention to the calcium switch, which is the most common feeding mistake. This becomes your reference for what to buy as the birds grow.

- What feed and protein level do day-old chicks get, and for how long?

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- At what age and first egg do hens switch to layer feed, and why must chicks never get it?
 - What is the difference between grit and oyster shell, and which birds need each?
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Worksheet: Brooder Temperature Ramp Log

Run the brooder temperature down week by week and record what you actually set and observe. Start the warm zone near 95 F and drop about 5 F each week. Note the chicks' behavior, since they are the real thermometer, and use the brooder template to track it day to day.

Week number (1 to 6)

Target warm-zone temperature (F)

Actual measured temperature (F)

Chick behavior (piled under heat / spread out / at edges panting)

Adjustment made to heat source

Pasty-butt check done and any chick treated

Checklist: Brooder Setup (Before Chicks Arrive)

- Safe heat source ready (radiant plate preferred over a heat lamp)
- Warm zone tested at about 95 F with a cooler zone to escape to
- Non-slip bedding down (pine shavings or paper towel, not slick newspaper)
- Chick feeder filled with chick starter
- Chick waterer filled, with stones or marbles to prevent drowning
- Walls high or covered so chicks cannot jump out
- Brooder placed safe from drafts, pets, and fire risk

Health, Eggs, and Ongoing Management

Build a daily health-observation habit, prevent the common ailments, and set up clean egg handling and storage.

Worksheet: Daily Flock Health Check

Use this as your one-minute daily once-over and weekly hands-on check. Record what normal looks like for your birds so any deviation stands out, and note anything off so you catch illness before a prey animal hides it.

Date

All birds alert, active, and eating/drinking? (yes/no)

Combs full and good color? (yes/no/notes)

Droppings normal vs watery/bloody/green/white

Any bird standing apart, hunched, or fluffed?

Breathing normal vs sneezing/gasping/rattling

Weekly keel/weight and vent parasite check notes

Checklist: Prevention and Biosecurity Routine

- Coop kept clean, dry, ventilated, and uncrowded
- Dust-bathing area available for parasite control
- Medicated chick starter and dry brooder bedding used for young birds
- New or returning birds quarantined several weeks before mixing
- Chicks vaccinated where appropriate (e.g. Marek's) and visitors limited
- Layers given oyster shell free-choice alongside layer feed
- Sick birds isolated to a warm, quiet spot with food and water

Exercise: Egg Handling and the Bloom Decision

Write out your egg routine using the bloom principle from the course. Decide how often you will collect, how you will handle clean versus soiled eggs, and how you will store and rotate them so none go to waste.

- How often will you collect eggs, and why does collecting promptly matter?

- What is the bloom, and what is your rule for washing versus dry-brushing a soiled egg?

- How will you store and rotate eggs, and how does the float test tell you an egg is too old?

Worksheet: Egg Production and Cost Log

Track eggs collected and feed used so you understand your flock's real output and cost across the seasons. Record weekly counts and leave the totals and per-egg cost blank for you to calculate, watching production rise in spring and fall in winter.

Week starting (date)

Eggs collected this week

Number of hens currently laying

Feed used this week (kg or bags)

Feed and bedding cost this week

Notes (molt, broody, weather, daylight hours)

Your Action Plan

1. Confirm your local bylaws first: bird limit, rooster rule, permit, and coop setback distances.
2. Decide your goal, size the flock to your egg demand (at least three birds), and shortlist two or three hardy breeds for your climate.
3. Calculate coop and run size from the per-bird standards, then build or buy to that minimum or larger.
4. Predator-proof everything: half-inch hardware cloth, raccoon-proof latches, a dig apron, and a covered top.
5. Install an automatic pop door or commit to shutting the coop every night without fail.
6. Set up feed and water systems sized for several days, and store feed in a sealed metal bin.
7. Build and test the brooder before chicks arrive, then brood down about 5 F per week, reading their behavior, until coop-ready at about six weeks.
8. Start a daily one-minute health check and a weekly hands-on inspection from day one.
9. Switch hens to layer feed plus free-choice oyster shell at the first egg, never feeding it to chicks.
10. Collect eggs daily, keep the bloom on clean eggs, and run a float test on any egg whose age you doubt.

