

Fact Sheet:- Chickens

TERMS:

Rooster or cock (male) has a long plumed tail with shining, colourful feathers; long comb and wattles; crows; fiercely protects the hens in his flock or territory and is dominant over the females in the pecking order, i.e. at feeding time, etc.

Hen (female) has a short tail with dull plumage; short comb and wattles; clucks and cackles; very timid in nature and tends to run away; sits on sits to hatch them and tends to the young.

Pullet is a female chicken in her first year or until she begins to lay eggs (approx. 20 weeks)

Chick (baby)

Flock refers to a group of chickens.

Clutch refers to a number of eggs.

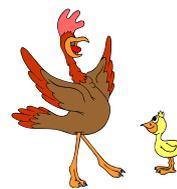
Brood refers to a number of chickens hatched at one time.

Broody hen refers to a hen that wants to sit on a number of eggs in order to hatch chickens.

Poultry refers to domesticated birds that are kept for the purpose of collecting eggs or killing for their meat or feathers, e.g. chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese, emu, etc.



INTERESTING FACTS:



- Most hens will lay an egg a day for the two years and then continue to lay eggs but less often, e.g. every second day and then every third day, etc.
- Hens go “off the lay” when they moult and in times of stress, e.g. excessive heat or cold, poor nutrition, illness, etc.
- Hens do not need roosters to lay eggs. Roosters are only necessary for the fertilization of eggs. However, roosters do make good guards for the flock protecting them from predators.
- Many hens will “cackle” after an egg is laid. This appears to be a celebration and sometimes other chickens join in “cackling” as well.
- A broody hen will sit on any eggs regardless of whether they are fertile or not.
- The colour of the egg yolk is dependant on the food that hens eat.
- To find out if an egg is fresh or stale, place the egg in a bowl of water. A fresh egg will stay on the bottom and stale eggs will float.
- The fear of chickens is called “Alektorophobia”.



ORIGIN:

Charles Darwin considered that chickens descended from of a single wild species, the red jungle fowl. It was domesticated in India for the purpose of cockfighting and not egg or meat production but the original home of the domestic fowl was in South Western Asia.

Today chickens are kept for their eggs and their meat. The poultry industry is very young in Australia. Commercial production only began in the 1950s and records were not kept until the mid 1960s.



MALE OR FEMALE:

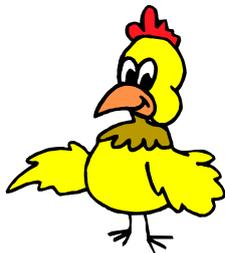


The adult rooster (male) can be identified from a hen (female) by

- A larger red comb on top of the head
- Longer hanging flaps of skin either side under their beaks (wattles)
- Long flowing and shiny tail and back feathers
- Pointed feathers on their necks (hackles)
- Longer spurs on their legs

DIET:

Chickens are omnivores, i.e. they eat both meat and plants. They scratch in the soil for seeds from grain plants, fruit from fruit bearing plants, insects, worms, spiders and scraps left over from humans. It is important for the nutrition of the chickens that all food given to them is fresh. Stale or mouldy food is not healthy for chickens and they will not thrive.



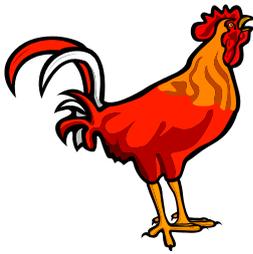
TYPES OF CHICKENS:

Although chickens are classified as a bird, they are not capable of long distance flight. Generally only the lighter weight birds are capable of flying short distances, e.g. over fences or into trees to escape danger or a predator. Given the opportunity some chickens like to roost in trees.

Chickens are raised for both meat or egg production. *There are so many different breeds it would be best to refer to one of the following web sites for more relevant information:*

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_chicken_breeds

www.mypetchicken.com



BREEDS:

There are 5 popular breeds of chickens in Australia. These being: Black Australorp, Rhode Island Red, White Leghorn, Light Sussex and Plymouth Rock.

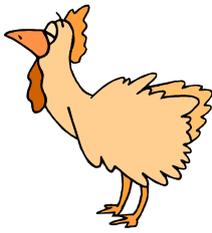
- Black Australorps are friendly and quiet. They are good family pets, great mothers, and good egg layers. Their eggs are light brown in colour.
- Rhode Island Reds are quiet and integrate well with other breeds. As they are hardy chickens, they are good to use for cross breeding. They, too, will lay a light brown eggs and are good layers.
- White Leghorns are more nervous in nature. For the purposes of cross breeding a larger chicken it is best to use a white leghorn rooster to breed with the hens of other breeds. They, too, are good layers and the hens will lay a large white egg but does not have a tendency to go broody.
- Light Sussex is more popular with breeders. There are many varieties within the breed. They lay brown eggs but are used more as a meat bird.
- Plymouth rocks are large speckled birds with yellow legs and beaks. They lay brown eggs and are good for both egg production and meat.



CHICKEN EGGS:

- Age, breed and weight of the hen influences the size of the egg that she lays, e.g. small hens lay small eggs, large hens lay large eggs and as a hen ages, the size of the egg increases as they are not laying eggs as frequently.
- The colour of the shell is dependant on the breed of chicken.
- The yolk of a hen egg will vary according to the food the hen eats, e.g. if a hen was to eat a lot of capsicum, the yolk would be a deep orange colour. The eggs from free range hens would provide a variety of coloured yolks from pale yellow to orange.
- A female chick is born with a set number of tiny reproductive cells (undeveloped eggs). These cells number into many hundreds.
- When hens reach maturity, they will begin to lay an egg a day. Thereafter, on any given day, a hen will have eggs at different stages of development in the oviduct (the canal that the egg passes along).
- A rooster does not need to mate with a hen everyday to provide fertilization for the eggs.
- Every egg yolk has a white disk called a “blastoderm”. If the egg has been fertilized then this disk is not solid but looks more like a ring or a donut.

*For further reference material such as the development of a chicken as it grows in the egg and the diagrams to show the specific parts of an egg do a Google search using “**egg development chicken**” and it will provide you with a multitude of sites, diagrams and photographs, e.g. www.poultryhub.org*



CHICKEN PRODUCTS:

Chickens are raised for either meat or egg production. Commercial production is divided into two categories – light and heavy breeds.

Light breeds (e.g. Leghorns) are used for egg production. These breeds have small bodies, are lightly feathered, nervous in nature but they mature early and begin to lay eggs at 17-19 weeks. They lay approx 280-300 eggs per annum.

Heavy breeds (e.g. Plymouth Rock) are used in meat production for outlets such as take-away chicken and supermarkets. They have a large frame; gain weight easily; have white flesh and are docile birds.

Egg production includes two areas: household use of eggs and commercial use of egg products. The commercial use of egg products refers to eggs that have been shelled and the yolk and white pasteurized. These products can be divided into 5 groups – refrigerated liquid, frozen, dried, specialty and consumer products. Examples of commercial products are given below but each day more and more egg products are coming onto the market.

1. Refrigerated liquid egg – distributed in bulk tanks of approx. 1000kg in weight. Major uses are in biscuit and pastry manufacture.
2. Frozen egg – packed in containers of 10kg of product, e.g. frozen liquid egg, frozen yolk, frozen egg white, frozen salted egg yolk and frozen sugar egg yolk. Major users are pastry cooks, restaurants, hospitals and clubs.
3. Dried egg – used in packet cake mixes, crumb mixes and health drinks. It is also supplied to the makers of chocolates.
4. Speciality products – supplied to individual customers or the catering trade in the form of whole, hard boiled, peeled eggs; chopped eggs; scrambled mix; omelette mix; and pickled, hard boiled eggs.
5. Consumer products – supplied for home use as yolk free mix, French crepes, Pavlova mix, egg nuggets, egg white mix and frozen French toast.

