

Notes for Chicken Keepers

With the increase in popularity of chickens as garden pets we thought it was worthwhile putting together a few brief notes. There are many sources of information, which we will not duplicate here, and just wish to draw you attention to a few of the factors to be considered prior to keeping chickens.

The following recommendations are for free range birds:

In house stocking at no greater than 9 birds per m²
Access to the outside run with 4m² per bird.

If your chicken house or run does not meet these requirements then you do not have 'free range' chickens. A movable house is a good idea if you have the space, as you need to avoid having a chicken house surrounded by mud. You can also get further advice on animal welfare from DEFRA.

If hens have access to grass they do not require extra greens, but in the winter cabbage stalks etc could be offered, they are best hung up so they don't get trampled. A high quality diet is important for a laying chicken and scraps are best avoided.

Chickens are generally healthy and provided they are looked after correctly require little or no intervention. If they do require treatment a medicine book is a legal requirement and should contain –

Bird's identification
Breed or Species
Age
Drug
Batch number
Dose
Route of administration
Date
Withdrawal time for meat or eggs

The eggs produced generally are for personal use but there are legal ramifications if you wish to sell them. Contact DEFRA to get up to date advice and register your birds. At the current time you must register your birds if you have more than 50.

For more information you may consider books such as 'Free Range Poultry', Whittet Books, or 'Poultry For Anyone', Whittet Books, and www.poultryclub.org.