

TOP 10 TIPS
for peak egg-laying
PERFORMANCE



BARASTOC

we put the chicken before the egg

WHETHER YOU HAVE A SMALL FLOCK ALREADY, OR ARE THINKING ABOUT STARTING OUT, HERE'S BARASTOC'S TOP 10 TIPS TO COACH HENS AND OTHER POULTRY TO HEALTH, HAPPINESS AND PEAK EGG-LAYING PERFORMANCE.



1

Know the rules of the game

Regulations on keeping poultry vary across Australia and cover such things as how many birds you're allowed to keep and whether roosters are allowed in the mix - not everyone is enamoured with a dawn chorus. Consult your local council to make sure you know where you (and your potential backyard boarders) stand.

2

Pick your team for their natural abilities

What's your reason for wanting chooks? For a bountiful supply of eggs commercial hybrids with high egg-laying potential (such as ISA Browns or Hy-line Browns) are ideal. If you are wanting 'chooks with looks' include Plymouth Rocks, Barnevelders, Silkies, Polishes, Frizzles and Sebrights will be great companions even if egg numbers are less.

3

Room to move

Considering whether you have enough room in your coop is key when deciding how many birds you will keep. Things to think about are whether your birds will have access to the backyard or mainly be within a chicken run coop. The more time they will be spending inside the hen house, the more room they will potentially need. You'll need at least 0.4 square metres of floor space per bird, bearing in mind their need to stretch their wings and play around.

4

Protect players from injury

Wherever you live in mainland Australia, the chances are high that there's a fox, feral cat, ferret or even native quoll lurking nearby with a taste for chicken. The enclosure you install must be strong enough to keep your chooks safe, particularly at night.

5

Ensure the coop is fit for purpose

Chooks like to lay in a place that's comfortable, private, clean and secure. If you don't want to have to hunt through the shrubbery for your breakfast's star ingredient, provide nest boxes lined with a dry, loose, light material and ensure cleaning schedules are met.

6

Hydrate

Surface water (collected from dams, rivers etc) or any water that could be contaminated by waterfowl or other wild birds can affect your hens. Try to keep the container off the ground so it stays free of droppings and deter your chickens from standing or walking through it. In the warmer months position the water in the shade and avoid using dark-coloured containers as these heat up quickly in the sun.

7

Foster team dynamics

Moving house and meeting strangers can be stressful for chooks. When new arrivals first appear, the established hierarchy of the flock is disrupted. Ditto when chickens suddenly show up in the territory of a pet dog or cat. Monitor the situation and intervene if necessary during the settling-in period to make sure nobody gets hurt. We would recommend introducing birds in at least a pair so that a single bird isn't bullied.

8

Is there a doctor in the (hen) house?

Familiarise yourself with common poultry diseases and use the Chook Check-Up Checklist to inspect your chooks - chickens will do their utmost to hide any signs of illness. If something seems out of the ordinary, call your vet straight away.

9

Yellow card

It's not just sportspeople that need to be sent off occasionally; poultry can develop undesirable tendencies, too. Watch for unwelcome behaviour such as broodiness, egg-eating, and plucking at feathers or pecking other birds, and be prepared to step in. Don't be afraid to isolate a bird for a few days or add toys or distractions into the pen or garden to act as a distraction and deter destructive behaviours.

10

Eat right

Just as you enjoy a varied diet, so too do your feathered friends. Foraging for tasty morsels is part and parcel of being a truly free-ranging chook. However, the average backyard does not contain nearly enough quality food for domestic poultry. Guarantee their health by providing a complete, balanced commercial feed enriched with calcium for eggshell and bone strength. Feeding at least 70% of their diets as a balanced feed is recommended to maintain their nutritional needs.