

My Top Ten Tips for Happy Hens!

by Clare Taylor In association with Life-Guard™

I keep a dozen pure breed bantams in my garden, and present chicken keeping courses for Cotswold Chickens in my spare time. My extensive experience in keeping chickens has shown me that good nutrition is essential for both their health and the quality of the eggs they lay. Here are my top ten tips for making sure you have Happy Hens!

1. Buy healthy birds

Always buy your birds from a reputable breeder or supplier & check that the bird is clean, lively and healthy. Check it for signs of lice and soil around the vent. Be prepared to walk away if the supplier has over-crowded or dirty pens.

2. Good quality housing

Your housing will need to be easy to clean, dry, secure and the right size for the number of hens you intend to keep. Allow at least a foot of roosting space per bird, and check that the interior is easy to access so that you can clean it easily.

3. Siting of housing

Your chickens need a sheltered spot, which is out of direct sun, rain and sheltered from the worst of the wind. You might also want to have the housing sitting inside a large, secure run so that it is totally safe from predators.

4. Nutrition

A well-balanced and fresh diet is important for the health of your flock, and also for the quality of the eggs that they produce. Choose good quality pellets or mash, keep their water topped up regularly, and add a good quality poultry tonic like Life-Guard™ to the water once a week in the summer and every day in the winter or when they are moulting; this will ensure that the birds are kept in tip top condition. My flock of pure breed bantams and miniatures seem to benefit from a little of the following mixed into their pellets: garlic powder, seaweed, limestone flour and Bokashi Bran. They always look healthy and glossy, laying fantastic, healthy eggs with thick creamy yolks.

5. Inspection of hens

It's important to get your hens used to being checked regularly and for you to be confident in handling them. Check each hen over at least every two weeks and look for lice or mites in their feathers, injuries and weight loss. Your flock will need a regular preventative treatment for worms and lice to keep them in top condition.

6. Cleaning the housing, run and equipment

The housing will need to be cleaned regularly - a good clean at least once a week is in order. The coop will need airing, spraying with a good disinfectant/anti-lice treatment and clean bedding putting down.

7. Buying and introducing new stock

It is not advisable to introduce just one hen as they will be bullied; expect to buy two at least, and use some extra housing to house them for a week or so while you quarantine them, inspect/treat them for lice and worms and introduce them slowly to your existing birds.

8. Wing clipping

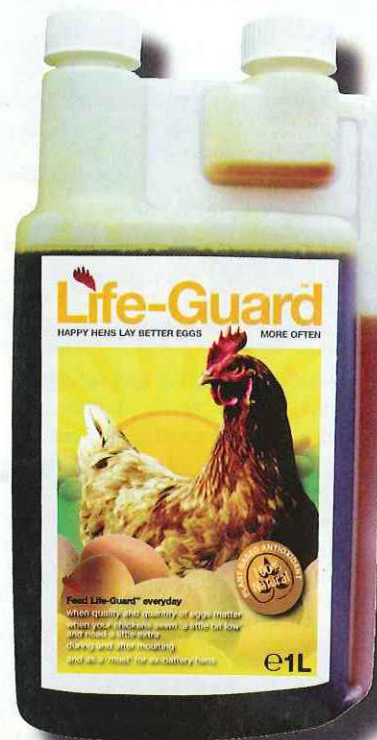
While your hens are still new to you, it is advisable to clip their wings to stop them flying off and decimating your neighbours' vegetable patches. Always clip just the one wing, trimming the primary flight feathers back about 5cm to stop them getting any height.

9. Moulting

You hens will moult and lose feathers each autumn. They will usually either stop laying or lay less eggs at this time as they need all those nutrients to grow their new clothes. I usually augment their feed with extra protein (meal worms or chick crumbs are good) and put Life-Guard™ in the water every day. I have found that this helps them to recover quicker and they soon start laying again.

10. Eggs and freshness

The old adage of getting out of your hen what you put in is so true; if you feed your hens good quality feed, allow them to free range to graze for greenery and insects, provide sound housing, then they will reward you with the best eggs you have ever tasted!



Life-Guard™ is a natural supplement formulated for chickens with a patented formula of antioxidants and vitamins, which will improve your hens' diet and lifestyle. For more information please visit www.life-guard.co.uk or call Natural Animal Feeds on Freephone 0800 373106

For more information on Clare Taylor's poultry keeping courses at Cotswold Chickens please visit www.cotswoldchickens.com/course.htm

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Feed Life-Guard™ everyday when quality and quantity of eggs matter; when your chickens seem 'a little bit low' and need a little extra; during and after moulting; and as a 'must' for ex battery hens.

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Internet access required. Start date 1st April 2009. Closing date for entries 30th June 2009.