

Advocating for DuPage County-Wide Allowance of Backyard Poultry

Small-scale poultry keeping is a healthy, economic, and sustainable way to feed and enrich our families and our community. Raising backyard poultry is an effective way of producing high-protein food in residential areas while encouraging sustainable living. Some area municipalities do not allow backyard poultry keeping, leaving residents to seek other sources for eggs and meat.

The GardenWorks Project advocates for residential poultry keeping in DuPage County because we support the efforts of residents who wish to grow (and raise) food for themselves and area families facing food insecurity. Nearly 100,000 people in DuPage County are at risk of hunger or food insecurity in DuPage County.

Food pantries fill a vital need, but many pantries in DuPage County do not have the resources to store or distribute fresh foods, including eggs. If they do, in fact, have these resources, the eggs they provide are often nearing the end of their shelf-life. The GardenWorks Project encourages backyard chicken keepers to donate surplus eggs to their local food pantries so that everyone can enjoy this fresh protein source.

Most municipalities in DuPage County do not allow backyard chicken keeping, and residents are forced to purchase eggs imported from around the country, causing high food prices and environmental damage. The GardenWorks Project, our board of directors, and the families we serve asks that residents work with their local government toward the allowance of backyard chickens and other means for residents to produce food for themselves and their DuPage neighbors in need.

There are many prejudices and false beliefs about keeping chickens in an urban/suburban setting. Those myths are de-bunked [here](#). ([Link to Myths article below](#))

While some DuPage County and adjacent municipalities allow backyard chicken keeping, most do not.

Town	Number of Chickens Allowed	Setback Requirements	Enclosure Requirements	Other Information
Aurora				A select few properties are zoned farmland and can keep

				fowl.
Bartlett	4	10' from lot lines	Covered enclosure with attached covered run.	Application and \$25 fee required. A maximum of 25 residential lots may keep chickens at any one time. No slaughtering, roosters, ducks, geese or turkeys allowed.
Batavia	8	30' from other residential structures	Covered enclosure, minimum 32 square foot run.	No slaughtering, no roosters allowed.
Bensenville	4	10' from lot lines	Covered enclosure and run, minimum 4 square feet per hen.	No roosters allowed. Rear yard only.
Burr Ridge	4	10' from lot lines	Not to exceed 150 square feet	Minimum 1 acre. No slaughtering, no roosters allowed.
Darien	Does not specify	No regulation	No regulation	Keepers must observe noise ordinance.
Downers Grove	4	7' from lot line and adjacent properties.	Enclosed at all times.	Permit, \$84 fee, and neighbor permission required. No roosters allowed.
Naperville	8	30' from adjacent properties.	Enclosure sufficient for animal's needs.	No roosters allowed.

St. Charles	6	5' from lot lines	Enclosed or fenced at all times.	No roosters. Rear yard only. Screening from street view required.
Warrenville	10		Enclosed or fenced at all times.	No roosters. Minimum 10K square foot lot.
Westmont	6	20' from lot lines	5 square feet per hen, maximum 50 square feet, 7ft. tall.	No roosters. Rear yard only.
Wood Dale	Does not specify	450' from adjacent properties		Must not disturb the peace.

*This table should not be used as a substitute for your municipality's ordinance. Always consult with your municipality before deciding to keep chickens.

Changing Local Backyard Chicken Ordinances

Many people have been successful in changing their local laws and ordinances. Here are some tips for changing the law where you live:

1. Find out exactly what your local ordinances are and make sure they are sufficiently specific. Some ordinances may be vague enough for you take advantage of, for example one that prohibits "barn animals," but doesn't specify poultry. However, some ordinances state that anything not addressed in the ordinance is assumed prohibited. Get your information directly from the city, in writing.
2. Ask around and check Facebook for groups of people in your town who are already busy trying to change your local laws. If not, invite others from your area and create a support group. There is strength in numbers and the more people sign on, the better your chances of success will be. Organizations like The GardenWorks Project and Sustain DuPage can help by writing a letter in support of backyard chicken keeping that you may present to your local government.
3. Contact one of the chicken-friendly towns above. Ask about their policies, how it works and if it has been successful. Then draft an ordinance that is appropriate to your town. Links to local ordinances are located in the table above.

4. Assemble an informational packet, based on the information you get. State facts, cite your references, include maps charts, photographs and letters of support.
5. Once you've got all the information you need, contact your city council and request the issue be placed on the council meeting agenda. Find out how your council meetings work and when public comments are allowed. Learn the protocol for submitting an item for discussion with your public officials.
6. Expect for this to take months. Changing city ordinances is neither easy nor quick, but it can be done. Stay polite, friendly, firm and persistent. This will help win your council's favor and show them you are serious.

A Brief History of Chicken Keeping in the United States

Chickens were domesticated in northern China as early as 10,000 years ago and have remained prevalent throughout the entire history of the U.S.

In colonial America, chickens were raised by both the rich and poor and were the only livestock that impoverished families tended to have. The appeal of chicken rearing was simple: they were easy to raise, reproduced in large numbers and reached sexual maturity early. Although chicken rearing crossed economic lines, the care of chickens varied immensely with income. Farmers and poor families let chickens roam during the day, while wealthy families kept chickens in a building, though chicken coops were not yet common. Rich families often fed leftover food or dinner scraps to their chickens, as opposed to poorer families who either let their chickens scavenge for food, or utilized garden waste such as vines.

In the early 20th century, chickens were primarily raised on family farms in small flocks. Families with large flocks sold eggs as their primary source of income and chicken meat was considered a delicacy reserved for special occasions and holidays. Chickens were purchased and sent through mail and were ordered straight run, or just hatched with no promise of gender. Chickens had a high turnover rate for most family farms; once new chicks were laying well, year-old hens were sold.

When the broiler industry was commercialized in the 1920s, chickens were confined to their own pens, separate from other farm animals, for the first time. Egg production increased and chicken mortality decreased, revolutionizing chicken rearing.

During World War II, those who owned plots of land were encouraged to grow community gardens with chickens to compensate for shortages and rations.

As urbanization moved many farming families to cities, chickens were brought along while other farm animals were left behind. Even city-dwellers with a patch of grass could own

chickens, as few cities outlawed chicken rearing until decades later. - Joy Davis for The GardenWorks Project

More resources

- [DuPage Chicken Keepers Network on Facebook](#)
- [Are Backyard Chickens for You?](#)
- [Costs and Benefits of Raising Backyard Chickens](#)
- [Winterizing Backyard Chickens](#)

Seven Urban Chicken Myths

by Patricia Foreman for Backyard Poultry Magazine

The local foods movement is not only gaining ground, it is here to stay; and that includes family flocks of chickens. Chickens are the mascots of local foods because of the many talents and skill sets they innately bring to small-scale food production. These skill sets include being pesticides (eating mosquitoes, ticks and fleas), herbicides (by eating and clearing unwanted vegetation), and organic fertilizer generators (that can help create and enhance garden soil). The trend for backyard flocks is so strong, that in the past two years, over 500 towns and cities have revised their laws to allow urban folks to keep their own chickens.

With the reemergence of backyard chickens across the country, there have been tremendous amounts of misconceptions, false beliefs and downright prejudice surrounding the keeping of micro-flocks of chickens. As the co-host of the Chicken Whisperer Backyard Poultry and Sustainable Lifestyles Talk Show, I have heard it all.

There are seven main concerns that routinely surface when the topic of city chicks is discussed. These are: 1. disease, 2. noise, 3. waste, odor and flies, 4. predators and rodents, 5. property values, 6. appearance, and 7. what will neighbors think? Let's look at the facts behind each of these concerns.

Myth 1. Chickens carry diseases communicable to humans. Fact: The truth is that small flocks have literally no risk of avian flu transmission to humans. The 2006 Grain Report states: "When it comes to bird flu, diverse small-scale poultry is the solution, not the problem."

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states on their website: "There is no need at present to remove a (family) flock of chickens because of concerns regarding avian flu." Avian flu has been in the press as a concern to commercial poultry production where birds are raised in monster-size flocks confined in over-crowded environments. This causes high stress and compromised immune systems in the birds. Any sign of disease, including a sneeze, could result

in a huge number of birds getting sick; and this puts at risk a large amount of profit. As many experts have stated publicly, the solution to avian flu is in small-scale poultry.

Myth 2. Chickens are too noisy. Fact: Laying hens—at their loudest—have about the same decibel level as human conversation (60 to 70 decibels). Hens are so quiet that there have been cases of family flocks being kept for years without the next door neighbors knowing it.

To some, noise is a concern with roosters and their pre-dawn heralding of sunrises. Many urban codes ban roosters, or only allow them to be kept with special permits. The noise level of a rooster's crow is about the same as a barking dog; 90 decibels. But there are ways to keep roosters quiet throughout the night. Many folks regard crowing as a pleasant sound.

Myth 3. Chickens cause waste and odor. Fact: A 40-pound dog generates more solid waste than 10 chickens. To be more specific, one 40-pound dog generates about .75 pounds of poop every day. Ten chickens generate about .66 pounds daily poop.

The advantage to chicken poop is that it can be used as valuable, high-nitrogen fertilizer. Unlike dog or cat poop, chicken poop can be combined with yard and leaf waste to create compost. Just as valuable, about 40% of the chicken manure is organic matter necessary for building fertile, healthy topsoil.

Chicken manure is so valuable that there is a product called Cockadoodle Doo®. What is Cockadoodle Doo made of? You guessed it; dried chicken manure. A 20-pound bag sells for \$15. That's 76 cents a pound for chicken manure! Let's take the stakes even higher. Where does most commercial fertilizer come from? Think oil. Can chickens' services and products help us decrease our dependence on oil? Yes, in many ways and on many levels.

Myth 4. Chickens attract predators, pests and rodents. Fact: Predators and rodents are already living in urban areas. Wild bird feeders, pet food, gardens, fish ponds, bird baths and trash waiting to be collected all attract raccoons, foxes, rodents and flies. Modern micro-flock coops, such as chicken tractors, arks, and other pens are ways of keeping, and managing, family flocks that eliminate concerns about predators, rodents and other pests.

Indeed, chickens are part of the solution to pesky problems. Chickens are voracious carnivores and will seek out and eat just about anything that moves including ticks (think Lyme disease), fleas, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, stink bugs, slugs, and even mice, baby rats and small snakes.

Myth 5. Property values will decrease. Fact: There is not one single documented case that we know of about a next door family flock that has decreased the value of real estate. On the contrary, local foods and living green is so fashionable, that some Realtors and home sellers are offering a free chicken coop with every sale.

Myth 6. Coops are ugly. Fact: Micro-flock coop designs can be totally charming, upscale and even whimsical. Some of them are architect designed and cost thousands of dollars. Common

design features include blending in with the local architectural style, matching the slope of the roof and complementing color schemes.

Myth 7. What will neighbors think? Fact: You can't control what anyone thinks, much less your neighbor.

Once folks gain more experience with the advantages and charms of chickens, most prejudice and fear evaporates; especially when you share some of those fresh, heart-healthy, good-for-you eggs from your family flock.

There is one huge advantage to family flocks that is often overlooked during chicken debates. That is their role and value in solid waste management systems. Chickens, as clucking civic workers, are biomass recyclers and can divert tons of organic matter from the trash collection and landfills.

Chickens will eat just about all kitchen "waste." They love people food, even those "gone-by" leftovers that have seasoned in the refrigerator. Combine their manure with grass clippings, fallen leaves and garden waste, and you create compost. Composting with chicken helpers keeps tons of biomass out of municipal trashcollection systems.

All this can save big time taxpayer dollars, which is especially valuable in these times of stressed municipal budgets.

There is precedence for employing family flocks as part of trash management. It is being done very successfully in some European towns. One example is the town of Deist in Flanders, Belgium. The city buys laying hens to give to residents who want them. The chickens' job is to divert food waste from the trash stream and eliminateshaving to be picked up by workers, transported, and then disposed. The savings are significant.

May the flock be with you...and to quote the Chicken: "evermore."