

Backyard Chickens

So the hens have quit laying and you're wondering 'what's the deal'? First of all, if we consider what is involved in laying just one egg, we might be more appreciative of what those girls do 240 days a year. When a female chick is hatched, she already contains the thousands of 'ova' that will become the eggs she will lay in her lifetime. When she reaches egg laying maturity, about 6 months for most laying breeds, one ovum each 25 hours, travels down the oviduct, on its way to becoming encapsulated by the calcium shield we call an 'eggshell'. Most hens will lay about six out of seven days during the laying season. One of the most critical components of laying season is day length of 12 to 14 hours. Some backyard chicken owners keep their hens laying by use of artificial lighting two or three hours a day, however, most just let the hens 'take a break' until spring.

Many people think hens need a rooster to produce eggs, but that is not true, they do just fine without him. Some factors that do discourage laying are molting, winter daylight shortage, temperature extremes, poor nutrition, lack of fresh water, stress, or illness.

Backyard poultry flocks are becoming increasingly popular. In a recent online 'backyard chicken' group, a poll of chicken owners revealed that having a source of fresh 'homegrown' eggs was the most important reason people raised chickens. However, the second most popular reason for keeping chickens (72%) was for pets and companionship. Yes, chickens are just COOL!

For further information regarding backyard poultry projects, please call or come by the Murray County OSU Extension office. Office phone (580)622-3016.

John Holman, Murray County Extension Educator Ag/4-H

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