



Advice on keeping poultry

Keeping a few chickens in your back garden can be a rewarding hobby and a great way to enjoy fresh eggs. There are no specific laws that stop you from keeping chickens, but it's a good idea to check your property deeds or speak to your landlord to make sure there aren't any restrictions on keeping 'livestock'.

In most cases, you won't need planning permission if you're only keeping a small number of chickens in a modest, garden-shed-sized coop. Problems are more likely to arise if neighbours are affected, for example, by noise from the birds, unpleasant smells, or issues with vermin caused by how the chickens are kept.

Contents

- [What do I need to be aware of under UK nuisance law](#)
- [How many birds can I keep in my back garden](#)
- [General advice](#)
- [Noise](#)
- [Odour and flies](#)
- [Waste](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Rats and mice](#)
- [Related](#)

What do I need to be aware of under UK nuisance law

By law, local councils must investigate complaints about public health and nuisance issues under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. With regard to keeping poultry this can be noise, odour and the attraction of insects and vermin. If we find that any of these issues are significantly affecting someone's enjoyment of their property, we may take action by issuing a legal notice to the person responsible. This will require them to take action to resolve the problem, and failure to do so could lead to prosecution.

With this in mind it is important to ensure that you practice good hygiene and house-keeping not only for the welfare of your hens but also to avoid causing problems for your neighbours.

How many birds can I keep in my back garden

There are no limits specified but you will need to be realistic about the amount of space you have available, the time commitment you can make, costs involved (feed, medication, parasite and disease treatment) and the impact a large number of birds might have on your neighbours.

Most people base their decision on how many eggs they want. As a rule of thumb a hen can lay between 200 and 250 eggs per year depending on their breed, health, age, how well they are fed and also the time of the year. You can sell any surplus unmarked eggs at your gate or locally door to door, but if you sell eggs to someone who will sell them on, such as a shopkeeper, you need to register with the Egg Marketing Inspectorate and also register as a food business with the council's Environmental Health team. In addition, if you are intending to keep more than 50 chickens, you will need to register your brood with DEFRA; this is so that poultry keepers can be notified of disease outbreaks such as Avian Influenza.

You can choose to [voluntarily register with Animal & Plant Agency \(APHA\) if you have fewer than 50 birds](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-as-a-keeper-of-less-than-50-poultry-or-other-captive-birds) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-as-a-keeper-of-less-than-50-poultry-or-other-captive-birds>), or birds you keep as pets. The APHA encourages you to register even if you do not have to by law.

By registering the APHA will be able to contact you if there's a disease outbreak (such as bird flu) in your area and you will help prevent the spread of disease and protect the national poultry flock.

You must register using the [compulsory registration form](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/608916f18fa8f51b909ca10f/IRA81.pdf) (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/608916f18fa8f51b909ca10f/IRA81.pdf>) within one month of keeping 50 or more birds on your premises. You're breaking the law if you do not register.

General advice

The first thing you should consider is the location of your coop. Placing it right up against neighbouring properties may become a problem if you are unable to sufficiently control noise, odour, flies and vermin. Secondly, you should consider the general welfare, house keeping and hygiene arrangements. Chickens need fresh food and water every day and cleaning out on a frequent basis. Generally a well-planned cleaning and feeding regime will help to minimise most problems, but make sure whoever looks after your brood when you go away knows what to do to maintain high standards.

Noise

Generally, hens do not cause too many problems although certain breeds are noisier than others. Hens can be very noisy when they lay so you may wish to consider the closeness of your coop to neighbouring properties and gardens.

Cockerels cause the most noise problems, particularly in the summer months when they begin crowing at sunrise and may continue throughout the day. If you are keeping only a few hens purely for egg production, you don't need a cockerel. Sometimes people unintentionally end up with a cockerel when they buy chicks; it is difficult to sex very young chicks and some may grow into cockerels. It is very difficult to control their crowing during the day, but it can be controlled in the very

early morning if the cockerel is kept in a totally dark enclosure over night so that it cannot see the sunrise until it is let out to crow at a more reasonable time.

Odour and flies

The chicken coop can be a smelly place, particularly during the summer months. You should ensure that you clean the coop out on a regular basis and cleanse the area with a suitable disinfectant if necessary. It may be a good idea to use a plastic membrane underneath the coop to make it easier to do so, but be careful because sometimes mice will burrow under this and use it for shelter. Woodchip and straw absorb droppings and can be removed easily.

Waste

Do not allow excess food and bedding waste to accumulate on your property, it will start to smell, provide somewhere for flies to breed and mice to shelter and may attract rats looking for food. Make sure it is regularly gathered up, bagged and disposed of appropriately.

Food

Scattering the food across the ground often leads to some being missed by your birds and left for rats and mice. You get more control by using proper feeders that do not fall over or allow spillage and keep out the rain giving your birds' good access to dry pellets or grain. Try and monitor the amount of food you put out so that no excess is left for vermin. At night remove the feeders or empty them and collect up any spillage and also dispose of any domestic kitchen scraps you may have put out for them. Store your feed (and bedding) in secure vermin proof containers and clear up any spillages.

Rats and mice

Once vermin realise there is an accessible food supply they will return over and over leaving their faeces and urine to contaminate your hens' feed and water. You will also be exposing yourself, your family and your neighbours to the diseases that rats and mice carry in their faeces and urine. You need to ensure you do as much as possible to keep the area in and around your coop as clean as possible. Some people advise putting the coop on slabs or concrete base to make it easier to clean around the area. However, mice may burrow under the foundations so this not always a good idea. It is, however, good advice to raise the coop 20 to 25 centimetres off the ground to prevent rats or mice moving in underneath.

Related

British Hen Welfare Trust (<https://www.bhwt.org.uk/>)

Register as a keeper of 50 or more poultry or other captive birds
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/poultry-including-game-birds-registration-rules-and-forms>)

Register as a keeper of less than 50 poultry or other captive birds
(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-as-a-keeper-of-less-than-50-poultry-or-other-captive-birds>)

Contact details

Environmental Health team

If you have an enquiry, [send a message to the Environmental Health team](#)

© 2026 Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council