



WILLIAM FOWLER ALLOTMENT TRUST
THE GUILDHALL, CHIPPING NORTON, OXFORDSHIRE OX7 5NJ

TEL: 01608 642341

E Mail: office@chippingnorton-tc.gov.uk

Office Hours: Mon – Fri 9am – 1pm

Clerk: Ms Katherine Jang

Charity Commission No: 203329

William Fowler Allotments – Hens Policy

It doesn't matter if you decide to keep them as pets or for a supply of fresh eggs, keeping chickens is a serious matter and should only be done if you have the time and resources to look after them properly.

Despite their appearance and actions, hens are quite intelligent and naturally inquisitive, and like to look around, exploring their surroundings and scratching at the soil to see what they can unearth. They can get frustrated and bored if their surroundings are not well kept, which can lead to them fighting or becoming ill.

When you keep hens, you are legally required to ensure that the welfare needs of the birds are met at all times.

Duty of care

Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 places a duty of care on people to ensure they take reasonable steps in all the circumstances to meet the welfare needs of their animals to the extent required by good practice.

This means that animal owners or keepers are legally responsible for looking after their animals to a certain standard, and failing to do so is an offence. The Act requires that the needs of an animal for which a person is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.

You must ensure that they have the "5 freedoms" outlined by the Farmed Animal Welfare Committee as stated under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

These 5 freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
2. Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind
5. Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering

Hens are friendly birds and need company, so two is the minimum which can be kept. Depending on the variety of hen, a single bird can produce up to 300 eggs per year. Therefore, two or three birds will give a reasonable supply of eggs for the average family. A maximum of 3 hens are allowed on William Fowler Allotment Trust allotments.

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A cockerel is not necessary for egg production and are not permitted on William Fowler Allotment Trust allotments.

Hen houses and nesting boxes

All hens must be able to stand, turn round and stretch their wings when inside. They also need enough space to perch or sit down without interference from other birds, when they are all together inside the hen hut or in their outside space. A minimum floor area of 0.25m² (50x50cm) per bird is required in the hen house.

The hen house should be warm in winter and cool in summer, and must be dry, well-ventilated and above all, secure. Although enough fresh air should be provided by means of doors or other apertures, the birds should be protected from draughts, and it is recommended that the entry doors face due south wherever possible.

The floor inside the hut should be easy to keep clean, as the floor coverings will need to be topped up or replaced when needed. This is especially important when it's wet, and the floor coverings are used for foraging and dust bathing.

Perches should be around 3-5 cm wide with rounded edges (like a brush handle), and at the right height to suit the size of the bird. Hens like to perch & sleep together at night, so there should be enough room inside the hen house for all the birds to roost at the same time. At least 25 cm should be allowed for each bird, with enough room between the perches so that they can get up and down without hurting themselves.

All birds need peace and quiet to lay their eggs, and they will look around and investigate a number of places before settling down to lay. The nest boxes themselves should be draught-free, quiet and enclosed with a good layer of clean dry nesting material. There should be at least 1 box for every 3 birds.

Bedding in nest boxes and on the house floor must be dust free. Sawdust should not be used. Ideally, untreated softwood shavings, shredded paper/card, or chopped straw sold as horse bedding should be used and can be bought cheaply.

Fire precautions

All relevant fire precautions should be taken when storing inflammable materials i.e. wood shaving / bedding, waste litter and empty bags etc. and must be stored well away from the hen huts and exercise areas. Dry sand or something similar should be kept close by in case of emergencies i.e. for controlling small fires.

Hen huts require regular cleaning and disinfecting, and all litter and waste should be disposed of in secure containers. Nest boxes, roosting areas and perches must be properly and securely located inside the huts.

Outside areas

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When Avian Influenza restrictions are not in place, it is most important that all the birds have access to an outside exercise area during hot weather, or when it is warm and humid.

Hens must have continuous daytime access to open air runs, which should be moved regularly to avoid 'fowl sick' or muddy conditions that could lead to ill health or discomfort. These exercise areas can be provided with wire fenced runs. The run should be as big as possible, with the minimum size of around 2 m² per hen. Enclose the run with a sturdy chicken wire fence, at least 200cm high. A roof is essential where birds of prey are common or when Avian Influenza restrictions are in place.

There should also be overhead cover, such as small bushes or a purpose-built shelter which will give the hens protection not only from the sun but also from bad weather and any possible predators.

If the hen run is fixed and cannot be moved around, care must be taken to prevent the ground from becoming sour which will allow pests and parasites to build up in the soil. To prevent this, the ground should be covered with chunky grade wood chip, which will need to be replaced every couple of months. Pea gravel mixed with sand, to a depth of 10cm can be used instead, and can be hosed down for cleaning. If gravel/sand is used, good drainage is essential to prevent the ground from becoming wet or boggy.

Ideally a mobile hen run should be used, which can be moved every 2-3 days and can be moved onto empty beds or into a greenhouse or polytunnel, to clear the soil of weeds and pests.

The hens should be able to access the shelter at all times, except when the huts are being cleaned and disinfected etc. All exercise runs shall be escape and predator proof.

Health and disease control

A healthy bird will be alert and interested in her surroundings, have clear bright eyes, a good posture and will move quickly if startled. Normal behaviour includes scratching, foraging, nesting, roosting and dust bathing. Regular dust baths will help keep their skin, legs and feet clean and healthy and keep the hen's plumage free of pests. Hens will use any area of dry soil they can find, preferably in the sunshine. Alternatively, a box about 25 cm deep, full of dry compost, wood ash or additive free sand should be provided, but it will need to be under cover to keep the contents dry.

Hens must have access to a minimum of 8 hours' daylight during any day which is adequate to inspect all birds on the site.

A sick chicken will stand still, with its feathers ruffled and eyes closed to conserve energy. Early signs of ill health may include changes in food and water intake, in preening, in 'chatter' and in activity. There may also be a drop in egg production and changes in egg quality such as shell defects.

Any sick or injured birds must be removed immediately and isolated where the bird can be watched for a day or so before contacting a vet. If the bird is visibly ill or suffering, it must be taken to a vet immediately. However please be aware that not all vets have training on domestic chicken care.

The [British Hen Welfare Trust website](#) lists those which have been recommended to them by supporters.

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The cause of any disease or injury must be identified and remedial action taken. Any national disease prevention and/or control programmes must be adhered to.

If you need to kill a chicken, take it to a vet to be despatched humanely.

All hens must have an annual health check with a registered veterinary practice, with the results shared with the William Fowler Allotment Manager (office@chippingnorton-tc.gov.uk)

Cleansing and disinfection

Parasites, lice and red mites can be frequent problems, and the hens should be checked regularly for infestations. The hut should be tall enough to let the keeper to stand and inspect the birds while inside.

As well as inspecting and treating the birds, the hen house and nest boxes should also be cleaned and disinfected regularly to remove parasites etc. from crooks and crevices.

Where possible, the hut and runs should be moved every couple of months onto fresh grass. Regular worming will be needed, especially if the hens are not moved about onto fresh grass but are kept in the same runs for more than a month at a time.

The hen hut, run(s), and exercise area should be regularly cleaned and disinfected. More frequent cleaning is needed in winter, when the nights are longer, and the birds are inside more. If you can smell ammonia, you must clean the areas more frequently.

When the hen hut is cleaned, you should:

- Replace all the bedding in nest boxes. Only clean, fresh good quality bedding materials should be used.
- Remove all the droppings and bedding from floor – these can be added to a compost bin.
- Sweep or scrub house as appropriate.
- Where red mite is a problem, dust the house and bedding with a diatomaceous earth product recommended for chickens.

At least twice a year, the hen house should be given a thorough scrub, suitable disinfectants are available. Where possible, the hut should be dismantled first before scrubbing clean and left it in full sunlight for a while; the UV light will have a disinfectant effect.

Feeding and watering

Feeding food waste

Under The Animal By-Products Regulations 2005 it is illegal to feed hens with any waste food, raw or cooked, which has come from a household kitchen, restaurant, café or other catering establishment, even if vegetarian.

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Only vegetable waste that has not been come through a kitchen can be given to hens. Under the same regulations (which were introduced to prevent the spread of diseases such as foot and mouth), hens kept in the garden must not be allowed access to any compost heap/bin containing waste food from the kitchen.

Daily recommended requirements for one full-grown hen are:

- 'Layers' pellets or mash – 120 g per day (GM free and organic brands are available)
- Fresh water – up to 0.5 litres per day.
- Mixed grain – 15g but only as a treat which should be fed later in the day. Hens will fill up on grain, rather than eat the pellets which contain essential protein for laying. Organic grain is available.
- Grit and oyster shell – as required. This is essential for their digestion.
- Fresh greens – these are vital if the birds have no access to grass. A cabbage can be suspended from the roof of the run is ideal and will also provide entertainment

Hens need a balanced diet and must have access to food and clean fresh water at all times during daylight hours. Enough food should be given to ensure the hens are properly fed but not too much, as uneaten food left on the ground will attract vermin. Food and water containers should be kept clean and in good condition.

Hen feed should be stored in vermin proof containers and must be properly balanced for the type hens kept. The areas around the enclosures must be clean and free of bird feed, bedding and droppings so not to attract wild birds. Feed and bedding should be securely stored and manure bagged and disposed of in a waste bin.

The hens should be visited at least twice a day including during the winter months, to ensure they have enough to eat and to make sure that drinking water doesn't freeze during winter months.

Frequency of inspection

All birds must be inspected at least twice a day. The day-to-day care routine should include

First thing

1. Open the house door as early as possible and watch the birds for a few minutes to check that they are behaving normally. A change in behaviour may indicate a problem.
2. Give the birds fresh water, ensuring there is enough for the day.
3. Give fresh layers-pellets in feeder and check grit supplies.

Mid-morning

1. Scatter grain on ground or in a feeder but make sure it is all eaten to avoid attracting vermin.

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2. Collect eggs and replace soiled bedding as needed from nest boxes.
3. The birds can be let out of the run into the wider area if this is secure.

End of day

1. Hens will put themselves to bed at dusk, check they are all inside and close the house door securely.
2. Remove the feeders overnight and place in metal dustbin if mice or rats are a problem.

Every few days

1. Move run if appropriate.
2. Pick the birds up to check their health.
3. Clean drinkers and feeders.

Improvement notice

All Plot Holders who keep hens on their plots must allow the Allotment Manager and/or an Animal Welfare representative to inspect the poultry at any time. Anyone who keeps hens on their allotment must make sure they can be contacted by the Allotments office in case of emergencies

If the Allotments Manager or other William Fowler Allotment Trust representative becomes aware of any concerns about the welfare of any hens kept on an allotment plot, the Plot Holder will be contacted and requested to take the appropriate steps to improve the welfare of the birds in question.

Where it is thought necessary and is in the interest of any bird kept, Notice will be served accordingly to order improvements to the accommodation or overall management of a plot. In certain circumstances immediate rectification may be required.

Non-compliance of the health and welfare acts may result in enforcement action being taken against you, and you may be prosecuted.

Failure to keep any hens in safe and secure conditions with adequate food and/or water will result in the loss of your tenancy.

Avian Influenza

As from 1 October 2024, DEFRA registration is a legal requirement for bird keepers in Great Britain.

Any allotment plot holder who keeps birds on their plots, regardless of how many birds they have or if they are only kept as pets, are now legally required to register their birds with DEFRA.

These new rules cover owners of backyard flocks, allotment flocks, birds of prey and pigeon fanciers and, in England and Wales, all keepers were required to register their birds ahead of the legal deadline on 1 October 2024.

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Plot holders can register their birds by email or by [downloading the form from the gov.uk website](#).

All plot holders who keep birds on their plots will need to provide information, including their contact details, the location where birds are kept and details of the birds (species, number and what they are kept for).

When restrictions are issued by Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) regarding outbreaks of the highly pathogenic avian influenza all plot holders who have birds on their plots **must** follow those restrictions. Failure to comply could forfeit your tenancy.

For the latest information about new cases, plot holders should go to the [bird flu page on the gov.uk website](#).

All William Fowler Allotment Trust allotment plot holders who keep birds on their allotments are required by law to comply with **any** and **all** Avian Influenza restrictions issued by Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) as required. Failure to do so could forfeit your tenancy.

May 2025 update

Due to the reduction of the avian influenza risk to poultry and captive birds, plans have been announced to lift the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) housing measures in England from 15 May 2025.

The AIPZ mandating strict biosecurity measures will remain in place across Great Britain.

If you intend to allow your birds outside after 15 May 2025, you must take action now to prepare outside areas, please check the [information available on gov.uk](#).

As birds may have been housed for several months, there will be a 7 day transition period from 00:01 on 15 May 2025 until 00:01 on 22 May 2025 during which, where necessary, previously housed birds must be released gradually to minimise welfare issues. Keepers with any welfare concerns about their birds should speak to their vet. Further information is available in the [press release on gov.uk](#).

The areas around the enclosures must be clean and free of bird feed, bedding and droppings so not to attract wild birds. Feed and bedding should be securely stored and manure bagged and disposed of in a waste bin.

Agreement to keep hens

If you would like to keep hens on your allotment, please contact the Allotment Manager to receive a copy of the form to request consent to keep hens. Via email: office@chippingnorton-tc.gov.uk

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