

Helping Poultry Breeders Raise Birds in an Urban Area

By Bart Pals

Raising poultry within the city limits can be a fun and rewarding experience for everyone involved, but much planning is required. Many people are very successful in raising poultry in a residential area. All types of poultry are being bred successfully and without problems in urban settings.

This article is designed to be an aid in helping people protect their right to raise poultry within city limits. Please remember that it is not the birds that you keep but how you keep them that is important. Check local ordinances to know what is allowed.

The first thing that must be considered are the rights of your neighbors. Your birds must fit in with the neighborhood and the city. Cleanliness is the most important requirement for raising poultry in town. Your birds must be kept clean. Keeping the area neat and tidy will help with the general feeling towards your birds. It doesn't matter what you raise or what type of facilities you have, keep everything clean. Keeping pens fresh, keeping things picked up, and keeping the area swept will all aid in the general feeling of your neighbors towards your birds.

Insect control goes hand in hand with cleanliness. Backyard poultry breeders must control insects. Parasites must be kept off the birds and flies must be controlled around the poultry house. Keeping pens clean will aid in insect control but spraying or other measures may also be needed. Secure a place to dispose of waste and have a backup place secured in case the first one fails. Feed should be stored in containers that will help prevent rodents.

The type of building you use must fit in with the neighborhood. Take into consideration the type of siding, roofing, fencing, size, and the height of the building. This structure should blend in with the existing buildings. When designing the building, you must make sure that your birds are not going to wake the neighborhood at 5:00 A.M. Individual doors for each pen, that can be opened and shut at reasonable times, should be built into the structure to help minimize noise problems. The type and size of pens that you will be able to use may determine what type or types of poultry you will be able to raise. Your birds will have to be confined. Very few people will appreciate birds running around the neighborhood. Security measures may also have to be taken. Stray dogs, varmints, and vandals should be guarded against. Security lights, gates, fences, and strong wire will all help to protect your birds. Included in your building should be an area designed for show boxes, extra feeders and waterers, etc.

Plant shrubs or build a fence that will help deaden the sounds that the birds will make. Shrubs and fences also help the building blend in with the neighborhood. Planting flowers around the building also helps make the structure—and your birds—look more attractive to the neighbors.

Starting small and setting goals are essential. Start out with a pair or trio of birds and know how many birds you can easily handle. A trio of birds can produce a lot of chicks and these chicks will grow into adults. Know exactly how many birds your facility can handle and always remember not to overcrowd your birds. One must realize that not every chick hatched will be a “winner,” so if you plan on hatching many chicks be prepared to cull and have an outlet for the culls. When raising birds in town, you cannot keep the culls. Realizing this fact before hatching will help keep things under control.

You must consider what species of poultry to raise. It is pretty difficult to raise Toulouse geese in a residential area. Standard birds can be raised but in a limited area. Remember that you cannot keep as many as you might like because of limited space.

Remember that noise is a factor and that large fowl have a lower-pitched crow that travels farther than the sharp, high-pitched crow of a bantam.

Ducks can be raised in town, but they are messy and rather noisy. Ducks can be raised in town but remember that there will be extra work involved in keeping the area clean.

Extra precautions may have to be implemented to help control the extra sound from waterfowl as well.

What particular breed of poultry you raise should be considered. Docile breeds should be considered. Many breeds are known for their wild or tenacious behavior. These should be steered away from. Breeds that are not “flighty” and are not aggressive are the breeds that should be considered. Some breeds mature much faster and can be culled much sooner than others. Japanese bantams can be culled for long legs from the incubator. Slower maturing breeds mean that the young birds must be kept that much longer before you can cull, which means that fewer chicks can be hatched. Faster maturing breeds mean that you can cull sooner and hatch a few more chicks. It is very easy to get wrapped up in setting eggs and hatching chicks and in a few months you’re out of room and don’t know what to do with all of the young birds. You must always remember that you are dealing with limited space and manage your birds accordingly.

What variety of poultry you raise is yet another aspect that should be considered. Solid colored birds will give you a higher percentage of adult birds to pick from. Laced birds will provide more culls due to color problems. Some varieties will produce multiple colors of offspring. The blue variety will produce blue, black, and splash offspring.

Choosing the particular species, breed, and variety are very important aspects to consider before you begin raising poultry within the city limits.

It doesn’t matter what kind of poultry you raise. Be sure you understand everything that may be involved in raising that breed or variety of birds.

Investigate the breed that you are going to raise. Read and talk with other breeders about the breed and the variety that you have chosen. Many of these breeders have seen and dealt with some of the problems involved with a particular breed or variety. Learn from their experiences and perhaps you will have an easier time.

Educate your neighbors about the birds you are raising. Frequently people think of poultry as either broilers or layers. They have no idea that there is such a wide variety of poultry. Educating your neighbors can have a very positive effect on your venture.

You can help educate your community by becoming involved with your local 4-H group. You can be involved in several areas of 4-H—by being a leader, a poultry project leader, or through the Extension Office as an Extension Council member. Being involved with your poultry club can help educate your city. Many clubs sponsor shows, set up displays at malls, print educational material, and do whatever they can to help promote exhibition poultry. Getting involved can help the local club, community—and you. Many people give talks in elementary schools and take live birds with them. All of these things help educate the community about poultry.

Things To Consider Before You Begin

Know the laws and ordinances pertaining to birds. Know the restrictions the city may have. Many cities have restrictions requiring poultry to be a certain distance from the property line, house, street, and alley. They also may restrict the number of birds you can have.

Know the laws and ordinances pertaining to other pets. Compare their restrictions with those for poultry.

Consider your birds as pets, not livestock, and treat them the same way a pet would be treated.

Follow the enclosed guidelines and remember that keeping poultry in a city is a privilege.

If You Have A Problem

If things go wrong, isolate the problem as soon as possible and correct it if possible. Make sure the problem is yours. One individual was accused of having a bad odor coming from his chickens. In fact, the odor problem was caused by a neighbor who had spread cow manure on his garden. It was mistakenly thought that the chickens were the cause of the odor.

Always remain calm, cool, and collected. When you become upset is when you are the most likely to make mistakes. Never accuse a city official of being wrong. Rather, suggest they “consider” your idea. One city official’s idea of being “grandfathered in” was that the city leg band all the birds. As the birds die, then the individual would turn in the leg band and would not be able to replace that bird. When all

of the birds were dead then the grandfathered-in individual would no longer be able to raise poultry. The official was asked to listen, compare, and consider the following. If the individual were a business and the chickens were the inventory, the business would have to close when the inventory was depleted. Usually a business is grandfathered in until that person dies, moves, or the business is sold—not until the inventory is gone. The officials saw their error and accepted the individual's idea.

Invite the city's health inspector to come to your place and see first hand your operation. Without the support of the city's health inspector, you will have a very difficult time trying to pursue the matter any further. Show the health inspector your pens and explain to him/her how often the pens are cleaned and how you dispose of waste. Explain your insect and rodent control methods. Show the health inspector how clean your operation really is.

Make your birds a benefit to the neighborhood. Offer extra eggs to the neighbors. Most people find the fresh eggs to be a treat. If the neighborhood children want to see your birds, take the time to go with them and let them see and touch the birds. Let them feel that they are part of your poultry program. If the neighborhood children don't like your birds, their parents probably won't either.

If a petition is filed against you please remember that most people will sign anything. You can get a copy of the petition from city hall and carefully go through it. Check names and addresses to make sure that they are actual and not invented. Check to make sure the addresses are within your area. One petition had the forged signature on it of the sister of one of the city officials.

Come up with your own petition. It is simply a matter of writing your point of view on a piece of paper and having people sign below it. Take your petition to all of your neighbors within a two-block radius of your place. If a neighbor will not sign it, then perhaps you have located the person making the complaint. If so, ask him/her what the problem is and correct it as soon as possible.

Try to secure as much local support as possible. If there is a council meeting scheduled, then make sure to attend it, along with as many other people as you can muster up. Sometimes there is strength in numbers.

Just because you have raised poultry in a particular area for many years does not guarantee that you will always be able to enjoy that privilege.

Simply because you are "grandfathered in" does not mean that the privilege cannot be taken away.

Invite city officials and council members to your house. Show them your facilities and explain to them how your birds are cared for.

Explain to the city officials what you are trying to accomplish. If you raise birds to be exhibited, then show them your awards. Explain the achievements that you have made through your hobby.

If the city officials and/or council members can not or will not come to your place, then send them a packet of information. Include pictures of your building, your birds, and an explanation of what you are trying to accomplish. Include a brief summary of how the birds are judged. Explain that you are trying to

follow a standard of perfection. Include in this packet written support statements from city leaders and other people who are aware of your accomplishments, your petition, and any other information that you may feel important for them to know about.

Hints

Consider your birds as pets, not livestock. When a bird lives for ten or more years and is cared for the way many people care for their birds, then they are more than simply farm livestock; they are pets.

Most larger cities allow poultry.

Most cities have no ordinances against crowing roosters. Most noise ordinances refer to barking dogs and loud vehicles.

Petitions do not generally hold much weight with city officials but they do usually thoroughly go over them to see if the people who have signed them are legitimate. City officials also realize that some people will sign anything. If a petition is signed by a limited number of people, all of whom live in the neighborhood, then the city officials will take them more seriously.

Make sure the complaint has come from within the neighborhood. Most cities will not consider a complaint except from a neighbor. A neighbor is usually within a two-block radius of your home.

Raising poultry is a hobby not a business. If you call it a business, you may be opening up a whole new can of worms.

Most elections are decided by a very small percent of the people so the more support you can show at a council meeting or public meeting the more influence you will have with the city officials.

If city officials receive more than four letters regarding a particular problem, they will take it seriously.

If your city allows dogs, cats, and other small pets, then they should allow bantams as pets. Some city governments have been challenged on this discrimination and have lost. Restrictions may apply, but they should be allowed.

Some cities have tried to include poultry with wolves, alligators, and other animals that may be dangerous to other people. If you are raising exhibition birds, you are not raising dangerous animals.

Remember: All states and cities have different laws and ordinances. Simply because one state does something one way does not mean that another state will do it that way.