

7 False Myths About Urban Chickens

Adapted from the book: *City Chicks* by Pat Foreman
and on NPR's Civic Soap Box

There are many false beliefs and prejudices about keeping chickens. Here's the facts about each issue.

Myth 1. Urban Chickens Carry Diseases. Fact: small flocks have literally no risk of avian flu transmission to humans. Centers for Disease Control states on their website: "There is no need at present to remove a family flock of chickens because of concerns regarding avian flu." The 2006 Grain Report states: "When it comes to bird flu, diverse small-scale poultry is the solution, not the problem." Salmonella is a food handling sanitary problem, not an avian problem.

Myth 2. Chickens are Noisy. Fact: laying hens — at their loudest — have about the same decibel level as human conversation (65 decibels). There are cases of flocks being kept for years without the next door neighbors knowing it. Roosters make most of the noise, and many times they're not allowed in urban areas.

Myth 3. Waste and Odor. Fact: a forty pound dog generates more doggie-do (about $\frac{3}{4}$ pound) than ten chickens (two-thirds pounds of daily poo). Both poops are smelly, but the key is to keep the chicken manure from accumulating by composting. Composted chicken manure is valuable as a high-nitrogen fertilizer.

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

And about those pests . . . chickens are voracious carnivores and will seek and eat just about anything that moves including ticks (think Lyme disease), fleas, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, stink bugs, slugs, even mice, baby rats and small snakes.

Myth 5. Property Values Will Decrease. Fact: 7 out of 10 cities on Forbes Magazine's "Most Desirable Cities" List for 2010 allow Backyard Chickens".

Myth 6. Coops are Ugly. Fact: micro-flock coop designs can be totally charming, upscale and even whimsical. Common design features include blending in with the local architectural, 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. But, in my experience, once folks understand the advantages and charms of chickens, most prejudice and fear evaporates; especially when you share some heart-healthy, good-for-you eggs from your hens.

Often overlooked is the value of chickens as clucking civic bio-recyclers. They can divert tons of "waste" from the trash collections. Chickens will eat just about any kitchen "waste", including "gone-by" leftovers that have seasoned in the refrigerator. Combine their manure with grass clippings and leaves to create compost and top soil.

Chickens are charming, amicable and entertaining beings that bring so many advantages to local agriculture and home gardens. They are truly "pets with benefits". May the flock be with you!

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