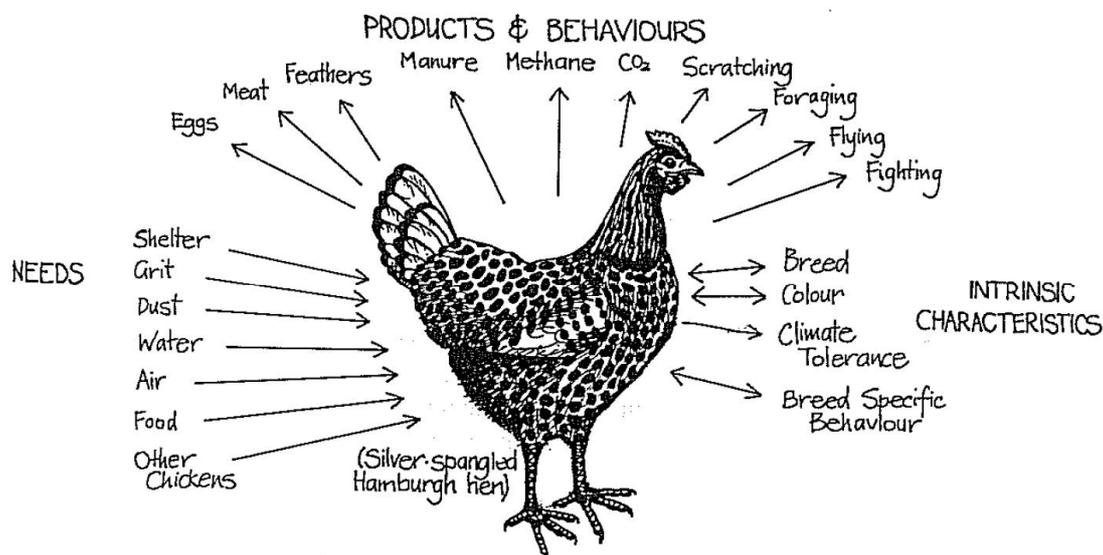


Permaculture Chickens

Everything in permaculture is about "Integration rather than Segregation", this is especially important for chooks and other animals in a system. By looking at Animals as design elements, permaculture shows how to best fit in the system and maximize its potential.



Chickens are wonderful pets and are fun to watch, and regularly produce home made eggs. But look above, you provide them with the easily homemade needs of shelter, food (kitchen waste), water and company (several chooks), and they provide, eggs, meat, manure, features, soil cultivation, pest removal and weeding, and many hidden ecosystem diversity builders. It amazes me that these animals seem to produce far more than they consume, and are truly biology and food production catalysts for your system.

Getting some chooks

Before getting chooks you might want to consider a few of their needs. A chook house must:

- Be fox and bird of prey proof, so dig in wire and enclose roof.
- Be weatherproof (yet allow for summer ventilation), with coops having adequate ventilation plus a draft free area for nesting boxes.
- Chickens are jungle fowl they, like shade and protection, with some warm morning sun.
- Have a perch (Chooks like to perch off the ground at night. These perches should be 30cm or more off the ground, allowing 30cm space per bird). The manure will build up under perches, so this should be deep litter area also, this allows them to scratch it around stopping the concentration and need for continual house cleaning.
- Food and water containers should be placed above the ground level at about the height of the chickens' backs, and must be kept clean and fresh.
- Be easy to access (you'll visit it at least once per day)

- Have nesting boxes where the chooks can lay their eggs in private. Nesting boxes should be about 300mm square. It is ideal if you can provide a hinged opening outside the coop, behind the nesting boxes, so that you can retrieve the eggs without disturbing your chooks (Old lawn mower leaf-catchers or wooden boxes are good. Add straw or preferably bug repelling tansy/wormwood to the laying boxes. Allow 1 nesting box for every 3 chooks)

Deep Litter Scratch Yard

A deep litter scratch yard, which is a fox-proof fully enclosed area adjoining the house is essential for urban backyard chickens to control odours, flies and scratch that chicken itch. Street tree mulch and any other carbon based litter can be used to similar effect, as per permaculture principles use what you have. Cover the floor with 30cm deep litter, and every few months put this into your compost systems and replace the litter.

Runs and Chook Tractors

Chooks need room to move about, and ideally need a large run broken up into several separately gated sections. Fences should be at least 1.4m high. This area usually doesn't need to be fox proof, as the chooks are only out in their run during the day. This run/area should be your orchard if possible. Note chickens will scratch the dirt continuously, so runs soon become devoid of vegetation and then become muddy, wet and unsightly, hence again advising deep litter runs.

Consider a chook 'tractor', i.e. a mobile pen without a floor. This can be moved around the garden allowing the chooks to scratch the ground and eat weeds or left-over veggies, while spreading their droppings.

Chook Plants

Comfrey, broad leaf plantain, Kale, nasturtiums, weeds are all good fast growing green food. Southernwood, Wormwood, Tansy, Rue and garlic can all be placed beside the chook run fence to be grazed for de-worming and general bug repellence.

Chooks Breeds and Buying Chooks

The brown chooks you normal see are Hyline, Hyline Brown, or Isa Brown. They lay 320 brown eggs a day for 2-3 years before declining. The Hyline has been especially bred as a factory chook, calm, strong egg layers. You might also choose other breeds, but as you cant have a roster and 'breed chooks' in the city meat breeds are not worth having.

I got some Point of lay (14 week) hens from Swan Valley Egg farm. You can also look up WA poultry breeders society to find reliable breeders. The quokka, Gumtree and other places have some cheap backyard chooks but often you end up with half rosters and half hens so not that helpful, or cheap in the long run.

For more information on Chickens, and other animals or to attend particular workshops on building structures and overall backyard design, please see the PermacultureWest website.