

Backyard Chickens

Judie Squires © 2006

Word Count: 615

“The Sky is falling” “the sky is falling” proclaimed Chicken Little in the all time classic children’s story.

As I watch my flock of backyard chickens I chuckle to see the differences in personalities. One of my Black Sexlink hens appears to be thinking the above statement daily screeching upon the slightest disturbance. My other black sexlink is very independent befriending my husband more so than myself. While my ISA brown, which I like to call “Red” is as intelligent as a chicken can be, cooing and chirping as if to be discussing every aspect of her previous evening or letting me know how delighted she is with the morning treats. Speaking of treats, the other four young hens that I had hand raised from chicks have a bit of a different outlook about me. A treat vending machine is all they will accept me as right now.

Raising a small backyard flock can be both amusing and rewarding. I would much rather spend a summer evening watching my birds scratch for bugs, take dust baths and interact with each other, than to sit in front of a television flicking through endless channels. It still excites me each morning to receive the rewards that my girls have given me – fresh organic eggs! How delightful is that.

Raising hens do come with its inconveniences. In order for your flock to be happy, healthy and safe you have to provide a shelter and pen for protection, give them ample space to roam, clean pens and coops regularly and ensure fresh food and water daily. For me the benefits still outweigh the work.

Raising hens organically is the best choice for both the hens and your family.

Organically raised hens provide eggs of the highest quality and healthier birds. It may be a little harder to find organic feed and grains, but it is available; you just may have to ask your local feed store to bring it in for you and you may have to pay a little more, but it is worth it.

Besides the obvious amusement and unlimited supply of eggs hens are also great composters, enjoying almost every morsel of organic tidbits that I can offer. Nothing in our kitchen will go to waste, acting quicker than a garbage compactor; the chickens don't take long to turn their treats into very usable manure for the garden.

Chickens are also one of the best natural insecticides and herbicides for your garden.

Roaming around, they will pluck every insect from sight and mow down those pesky weeds all the while dropping fine amounts of fresh manure along the way. Who needs noxious chemicals on their gardens anyway?

Friends and neighbors, especially children always love to see chicken roaming on a lawn, just put a few chickens out and watch the Sunday motorists slow down almost to a

complete stop, point and smile, only to turn around and drive by again – Amusement I tell you. And chickens love people too – Don't forget we are treat vending machines so if people visit remind them to bring an organic treat for the chickens, they will be expecting a potluck.

Chickens, as backyard companions can be very rewarding. There are so many colorful breeds to choose from that they can be attractive pets as well. Besides the impressive array of sizes, colors, designs and even feathered feet, you can also find breeds that lay a wide variety of colored eggs from almost black, chocolate brown, shades of blue and green, pink and standard brown and white. Chickens will be sure to amaze your family and friends. Once you discover these unique pets, you'll surely become hooked on these extraordinary birds.

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Since 1999, Judie has been aggressively researching a wide range of subjects, particularly those pertaining to human health and environmental issues. Judie has written for local, regional and national publications.