

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING

“Standards for Keeping Chickens”

As Described in Hopewell Township General Ordinances

PREPARED May 3, 2011

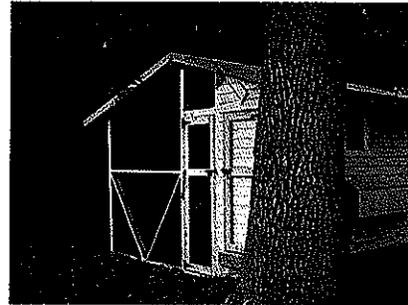
RESIDENTIAL ANIMAL AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE



This document offers simple answers to frequently asked questions about backyard chickens. It is not an official code document. Please consult with the Hopewell Township health or zoning officer and obtain the required zoning permit before beginning residential animal agriculture.

What Township rule allows people to keep chickens?

Hopewell Township encourages compatibility between agriculture and neighboring non-agricultural use through its right-to-farm ordinance. The Township permits “home agriculture,” defined as “the production principally for home use or consumption of plants, animals or their products and for sale to others where such sales are incidental, including, but not limited to, gardening, fruit



production and poultry and livestock products for household use only”. Hopewell’s General Ordinances Chapter V, “Animal Control,” include Section 5-9, “Standards for Keeping Chickens,” adopted April 25, 2011. Rules for other livestock are described elsewhere in the General Ordinances.

Hopewell’s rules governing keeping of backyard chickens were established to permit this form of residential agriculture while respecting the rights of other property owners. All animal owners should learn and follow good animal management practice, show respect for neighbors, and maintain full compliance with all applicable laws. The following is a simplified explanation of Hopewell Township’s rules. It is an introduction, but not the law itself. It is not intended as a primer in animal management. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse. If you have questions about this information, please consult with the Hopewell Township Health Officer at: **(609) 737-0120**.



How big a property do I need for chickens?

A minimum lot size of one-half acre is required to keep chickens.

How many chickens may I keep?

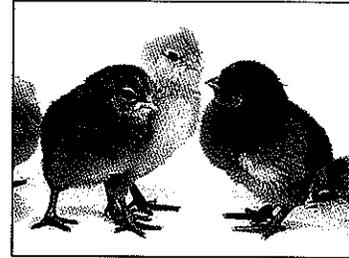
Up to 6 chickens may be kept on a ½ acre lot. For each additional 1/2 acre, 4 additional chickens may be kept.

May I keep roosters?

No. Mature roosters are prohibited. This rule was established to minimize the risk of irritating neighbors due to noise from a rooster. If a male chicken can crow or fertilize a hen, it is a mature rooster.

What if I get an un-sexed baby chick, or a fertilized egg and don't know if I own a rooster?

You are permitted to purchase un-sexed hatchlings or fertilized eggs. Un-sexed hatchlings are not mature enough to crow. However, any cockerel (a young male chicken) that crows must be culled or permanently removed from the property within 5 days. The penalty for failure to comply with this rule is intentionally harsh. If there are any crowing roosters or cockerels on a parcel for more than 20 days in any year, all roosters are prohibited from that property for 2 years.



What if I want my hens to be fertilized and to raise their chicks?

Hens produce eggs without the presence of a rooster. It is strongly recommended that beginning hen-keepers do not try to have their hens fertilized.

Using careful procedures, roosters may be brought to the property for the purpose of fertilization. NOTE: This can be stressful to all birds involved. If done carelessly, inter-mixing birds from different flocks can lead to injury of animals, disease, or death of the flocks. It is extremely important that proper "bio-security" technique is maintained.



- A rooster may visit the property for up to 10 days per year, but no more than 5 days in a row.
- In advance of any visit, roosters must have a written certificate of health issued by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. The rooster owner may require this of your hens as well. Obtaining a certificate of health involves quarantine for a few weeks and testing of the animals.
- If there are any crowing roosters or cockerels on a property for more than 20 days in any calendar

year, all roosters are prohibited from that property for at least a 24-month period.

What if I am raising birds for meat or need to cull one for other reasons?

Slaughtering chickens in public view is prohibited. This rule was established to avoid offending neighbors and passers-by. Use good judgment. Learn from someone with experience. Treat animals with respect. Be discreet.

What housing must I provide for my chickens?

Chickens shall be provided, and shall remain within a fully enclosed shelter.

- Shelters shall be located in the rear yard.
- Shelters shall be located at least 25 feet from any property line.
- Shelters must be at least 50 feet from houses on adjoining properties.

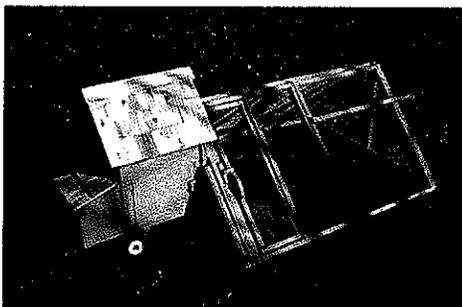


- Shelters shall not exceed 150 square feet in size or 14 feet in height.
- You must obtain a "shelter permit" from the Township zoning officer and any other state or local permit, if required. The fee for a zoning permit is currently \$20. Typically, a structure less than 100 square feet without electricity or plumbing will not require construction permits or inspections, but please review your specific plans with the Township zoning officer.

What if I want my chickens to forage for insects and grubs in the yard?

Once you provide shelter, you have two additional options to allow your chickens more space and access to forage:

1. You can provide them with a fenced enclosure. Fences shall not exceed 6 feet in height. Consult with the Township zoning officer before constructing a fence.



2. You can provide them with a "chicken tractor". A "chicken tractor" is a mobile cage or coop that fully encloses the chickens, but which is bottomless to allow chickens direct access to the ground. Use of a chicken tractor cannot replace the requirement for a shelter.

- Chicken tractors and fenced enclosures must remain within the back-yard boundaries listed

above for shelters.

- Chicken tractors and fenced enclosures may not be used as overnight shelters.

How do I have to manage the chicken manure?

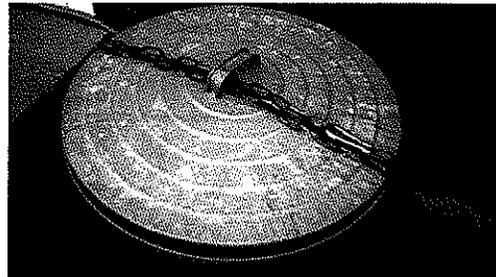
You can either dispose of animal waste in the trash or you can store and compost it. Composting is considered best practice since it turns something that would be added to a landfill into a beneficial resource for gardening and landscaping. Composting prior to re-use of manure is important since direct application of manure can damage plants rather than nourish them. Improper storage or composting can cause odor problems or attract predators.



- Waste storage must be at least 25 feet from any lot line.
- Waste storage must be at least and at least 50 feet from any house on an adjoining property.
- Composting shall follow health code or USDA guidelines
- Waste stored prior to disposal shall be or kept in a watertight container.

How do I need to protect poultry food from predators?

Animal feed stored outdoors shall be kept in metal containers with tightly-fitting lids. Raccoons and other predators are clever enough to climb over fences, open some gates, and open standard trash cans. It is best practice to keep the animals un-used feed indoors, or inside metal containers with tightly-fitting lids that include a latching closure device.



May I “free range” my chickens?

Your chickens must remain at all times within a fully enclosed shelter, fully fenced area on your property, or mobile chicken tractor. You are responsible to keep them from wandering off your property, onto public streets, or onto any private property without permission from the owner. In Hopewell Township “the chicken may not cross the road.”

What if my chickens make noise?

You may not keep an animal that disturbs the peace by making noise across a property line continually for 10 minutes or intermittently for 30 minutes, unless it is provoked. This same rule applies to all domestic animals in the Township. Hens rarely make loud noises except briefly when laying an egg or if in distress. This rule prevents the keeping of roosters that often make noise throughout the day.

Are there penalties for failing to follow the Township’s Standards for Keeping Chickens?

Yes. Penalties are described in Chapter III, Law Enforcement Regulations, Section 3-1. These can be read on the Township website, or in person at the Township offices.

Where can I get a zoning permit for the shelter?

Zoning Permits can be obtained at the Township offices or on line at:

http://www.hopewelltpw.org/Application_for_Zoning_Permit.pdf

How do chickens compare to other permitted activities in terms of land impact?

The limited numbers of agricultural animals permitted on small properties means that their impact on the land should be much less than other activities that are currently permitted such as lawn fertilizing, other pets, or wild animals.

Do I need a state license to raise backyard chickens?

No. At this time, there is no mandatory type of state licensing or registration for your backyard poultry flock.

How can I learn more about caring for chickens?

There are many resources available where interested homeowners can learn about raising small agricultural animals. Some of these include:

- **Rosedale Mills** offers classes on raising poultry and sells animal feed and supplies.
<http://www.rosedalemills.com/>
- **Hopewell Township's local farmers** – Meet them at the Pennington Farmers Market April through October.
- **University of Missouri Extension, Home Flock Guide:**
<http://extension.missouri.edu/>
- **Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens:**
<http://www.amazon.com/Storeys-Guide-Raising-Chickens-Facilities/dp/158017325X>
- **Your Chickens, A Kid's Guide To Raising and Showing:**
<http://www.amazon.com/Your-Chickens-Gail-Damerow/dp/0882668234#>
- **My Pet Chicken:** <http://www.mypetchicken.com/>
- **Rutgers Cooperative Extension:** <http://mgofmc.org/rutgers.html>
- **The institute for appropriate technology:** <http://www.i4at.org/lib2/chickens.htm>
- **Backyard Poultry Magazine:** <http://www.backyardpoultrymag.com/>
- **New Jersey Department of Agriculture:** Division of Animal Health has state rules and offers flock testing <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/>
- **Information about diseases, husbandry practices, cleaning and disinfecting methods:**
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/birdbiosecurity/
- **Backyard Chicken Raising Video:** <http://www.chickenvideo.com/index.html>

