

Chooks need both shelter from bad weather, and also shade from the hot sun. You will need a coop for them to sleep in over night, for protection from predators. You may or may not use a run to contain them outside during the day. How the coop and run is set up is important to get right from the outset.



Quick tips to get you started

1. Ideally place the coop in an area with trees and shrubs. Being in the open stresses chickens and this will affect their behaviour and production
2. A coop 2x2m is generally considered a minimum and appropriate for 4-5 hens. If you have a rooster he takes the space of 2 hens. For a dozen chooks, aim for a minimum of 3x3m. Overcrowding leads to stress, disease, and aggressive behaviour
3. Concrete or plastic flooring is ideal to allow you to clean and disinfect easily. Treating Red Mites can be very difficult with wooden coops, and wood also rots over time
4. Untreated wood shavings or bark chips on the floor are ideal as they are absorbent. Hay is not and will rot, harbouring bacteria and mould
5. Clean at LEAST every 2 weeks. You may clean it out completely, OR only remove the soiled surface, then replace with another layer of bedding to maintain a depth of 30cm. This is called

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6. a “deep litter system” and lets off warmth as it composts underneath. It is crucial that the bedding does not become wet or it will simply rot rather than compost
6. You may insulate your coop for warmth at night, but it must be well ventilated for hot nights. Birds are very prone to overheating just as much as cold stress. The ideal temperature is 21 degrees
7. Windows up high allow good ventilation without causing a draught
8. Perches should be 40-50cm above the ground, with soft bedding underneath to avoid foot injuries. They should be flat, with rounded corners (no sharp edges) and relatively wide (about 5cm). You should be able to remove them to clean
9. Each bird needs about 15cm of space
10. Nesting boxes should be cubes in a dark area of the coop. Fill them with bedding, but clean regularly to prevent soiled eggs
11. You need at least 1 nesting box per 3-4 hens
12. Nesting boxes should not be higher than the perches, so hens will sleep in them rather than on the perches
13. For the outdoor run you will need a minimum of 1 square metre per bird. Chooks will be happier and less stressed, the more space you allow them
14. If restricted to a run, the ground will be torn up quickly and you may need to bring in scratch material daily. A mobile run is ideal so long as it's large enough for the hens.

**Updated Aug 25*