

Lucky Hens Rescue

Care Sheet

General Advice

When your new hens arrive they may be in quite poor condition. But with lots of TLC they'll soon start to improve. They may have feathers missing and bald patches. The feathers will grow back eventually, but if other hens start to peck the bald patches you can spray antiseptic spray on them available from animal/horse feed supplies or pet shops.

Their comb may be very pale & large, this will redden again and shrink. Toenails are often long because of being in a confined cage, when the hens start to scratch about in the ground, they'll soon wear them down but if they can't stand properly then they can be trimmed with toenail clippers, like the ones used for dogs (Don't cut them too shorts, or you take the risk of nipping the vein). Sometimes their legs are weak and they may find it difficult to walk, but as soon as they get used to having more space they'll soon build up their strength.

In the first couple of weeks, keep the hens inside the hen house/run leaving the door open during the day so they can investigate the outside world if they want. They may not move around too much to begin with, remember these poor girls have never seen daylight for long before, if ever. You will find your girls will lay eggs anywhere on the floor at first, they do normally adjust to laying in the nests. If not you could try putting a plastic egg in there for a bit of encouragement.

Housing

There are plenty of hen houses available on the Internet/pet shops and garden centres, but converting a standard garden shed would be a perfectly acceptable hen house. 6"x4" will be enough for around 12 chickens. At first the hens won't be strong enough to jump onto the perch to roost, so you may have to provide them with a box on the floor or a ramp to walk up. The perch should be roughly 12" off the floor. Make sure the hen house is secure from predators so that they can be locked away safely in the evening.

Bedding

Wood shavings or sawdust are good for the floor and straw for the bed. Hay should be avoided as it can encourage mites. Sawdust that you get free from wood yards can be used but I would recommend that is sprayed slightly to dampen it to keep the dust down. Add tea tree and lavender to the water spray to give your hens a nice smelling and relaxing place to live.

Feed

It is a good idea to feed your hens layers mash for a few weeks as they probably won't eat anything else to start with, as this is all they have ever known. You can gradually introduce other foods such as layers pellets and mixed corn. You could also try tying up cabbage leaves around the run to occupy them. Food & water bowls need to be deeper because the hens have usually been de beaked and they will find it easier to scoop up the food and water.

Cleaning

The hen house is best kept on top of daily, by removal of droppings and soiled straw (this makes great compost) then top up with clean straw. Give the house a thorough clean monthly, ensuring all the corners, including the roof corners and perches (especially the ends of perches) are cleaned. Diatom DE (smite) is best sprinkled on top of the fresh layer of straw.

Punch ups

Still expect some punch ups. They'll have a go at each other quite readily, but this settles very quickly. This is as the saying goes "The Pecking Order".

Eggs

Expect a few for the first couple of days then non for quite a few whilst they adapt.

Health

We will never knowingly allow a hen to go home with health problems. When hens first go into cages they will have had a long list of vaccinations to protect the farmer against large losses, these are usually administered through spray misting the chicks or in their drinking water. The most common diseases vaccinated against are Marek's disease, infectious bronchitis, salmonella, Newcastle disease, Gumbaro disease and epidemic tumour.

One of the most common problems with Ex-Caged/Barn Hens is bruising, often to the leg and sometimes to the wings. This usually occurs when they are removed from their cages and can be so painful she can't stand. If you look, you will see dark bruising under the skin, Arnica cream works wonders. As long as she gets food and water, a bruised hen will recover within 7 – 14 days with no lasting effects. (If possible do not separate her from the other hens as when you return her she will seem like an outsider and be bullied).

Cockerels

Keep the girls separate from a cockerel for at least a month. They've never seen a cockerel and it's a pretty scary experience when they do. If he's big and keen he may do damage by jumping on a hen with weak legs and/or bald backs. Allow the hen's time to build up confidence and strength.

Bugs & parasites

The most common problem can be red mite. This is a tiny mite that feeds on the hens at night and then during the day lives in the coop/shed usually under perches or in the nesting area or simply in the cracks and joints in the house. It is something that can be controlled with many products on the market and, like fleas, will flare up in the warmer weather and die down during the winter months. It does not usually prove fatal to hens although in extreme cases if left untreated can cause death!

A good idea is to use a child's sand pit or make one maybe with 4 boards. Old scaffold boards are fine. Fill with sand, dry earth and ashes sprinkled with diatom and orange peel oil. This will suffocate lice and other parasites also keeping numbers down when the hen dust bathes.

Dust your coop with flea / mite powder once a month especially in the nest boxes, again there are plenty of products available on the market. You could also add garlic to their feed and apple cider vinegar (ACV) as a general health tonic and de wormer to keep on top of things

I would recommend worming your hen at least twice a year, because they are free to venture out now, they are likely to pick a few up from wild birds and insects. There are non-chemical/organic herbal feeds available with wormer in to give them once a month.