Urban Agriculture 101:

Keeping Urban Chickens
Workshop Topics

1) What’s a Chicken? The Basics
2) Assessing Feasibility of Keeping Chickens
3) Housing Your Hens
4) Which Breed is Right for You?
5) Feeding (and Watering) Your Hens
6) Keeping Chickens Clean and Healthy
7) Urban Specific Issues
1) So... What’s a Chicken?

• Basically, domesticated Asian jungle fowl.

• Range in size from $\frac{1}{2}$ pound up to 18 pounds.
What Do Chickens Do?

• Certain behaviors are instinctive.

• Chickens allowed to complete instinct-driven behavior are happy and stress free.
Chickens want to Forage

• Scratching in the dirt, grass, fallen leaves, or mulch.
Chickens Want Social Order!!

- They will establish a “pecking” order and enforce it.
Dust-bathing and Sun-bathing

• These chickens are happy, not dead.
Chickens Lay Eggs!

- They have to lay eggs, and they want a private place to do it.
Dogs Shed, Chickens Molt!

• Twice a year (fall & spring) chickens suddenly lose many of their feathers and grow new ones.
Breeds of Chickens

• Four Main Categories:
  – Layer breeds
  – Meat breeds
  – Dual Purpose breeds
  – Show/Fancy breeds

• Most breeds come in two sizes:
  – Regular and bantam
2) Feasibility: Can you even keep chickens?

• Three main criteria (in this order) that all would-be urban chicken keepers must first check on before getting hens.

  1. Neighbors
  2. City Ordinances
  3. Soil
Neighbors are #1!!

• Talk with your neighbors before doing anything else.
  – Let them ask questions, voice concerns, and feel heard.
City Ordinances

• Before you dive in, make sure you legally can!!
  – Permits?
  – Lot size requirements?
  – Setback requirements?
  – Roosters? (probably not)
  – Flock size limits?
Get Your Soil Tested!!

- This step can NOT be skipped by a would-be urban chicken keeper!
  - Urban soil can be toxic!!
3) Housing Your Hens

- You have to put them somewhere, after all.
Coops & Runs

• Considerations:
  – Location of the coop
  – Size of the coop
  – R-value (insulation)
  – Durability
  – Attractiveness
  – Cost
Pre-existing Structures can be coops!

- Barns, Garages, Sheds
  - More weatherproof space & shelter
  - Better soundproofing
  - More predator resistant.
- Must have good ventilation
- Must have natural light
4) Which Breed is Right for You?

• Consider Size
  – Standard or bantam?
• Consider Purpose
  – Layers, Lookers, or Dual Purpose?

White Leghorn Layer

Polish Frizzle Looker

Rhode Island Red Dual Purpose

• Over 400 chicken breeds to choose from!
Where can you buy chickens?

• Local options:
  – Limited breed options
  – You can see the set-up
  – Can get face to face help

• Large Scale National Hatcheries
  • More breed options
  • Large minimum orders
  • Customer service by phone only
Eggs, Chicks, or Pullets

- You can buy and hatch fertilized eggs.

Pro’s:
  - Fun for kids

Con’s:
  - Incubators are expensive
  - Eggs might not hatch
  - You might get a rooster or two.
  - They’re not vaccinated.
• You can buy 1—3 day old chicks

Pro’s:
• Fun for kids
• They’ll be sexed!
• They’ll be vaccinated.

Con’s:
• You’ll need a brooder set-up.
• Won’t start laying eggs for 4 to 5 months.
• You can buy pullets

Pro’s:
• No brooder setup needed.
• Eggs are 1—2 months away.

Con’s:
• Less cuteness.
• More $$/bird
5) Feeding (and Watering) Your Hens

• Hens eat about ¼ pound of feed each day.
  – They need special food.
    • Chick food for chicks
    • Grower food for pullets
    • Layer pellets for laying hens
What about Kitchen Scraps?

Yep, you can do that!

• They’re opportunistic omnivores!
Water is Essential!

• Hens need access to clean water 24/7!
Supplements

• Beyond food and water
  – All chickens need grit (tiny pebbles)
  – Laying hens sometimes need oyster shell
Keeping Chickens Clean & Healthy

• Coops should be clean, but not spotless!
  – Over-cleaning promotes disease and ectoparasites.
  – Clean coops are COLD coops in the winter.
How to give a chicken a physical!

- Chickens do get sick and hurt from time to time.
Signs of a Sick Chick

- Sluggishness, or lack of activity
- Self-isolation away from the other hens
- Dull or "Sleepy" eyes
- Head tucked close to the body
- Droopy wings not held close to the body
- Droopy tail
- Messy branches and loose, bad-smelling stool
Treatment Options

• A Trip to the Vet
  – A Poultry Vet!
• Treatment at Home
  – Isolation
  – Basic First aid
  – TLC
• Humane Culling
  – When all else fails

This might not be the best way to go with home health care for a chicken.
Treatment at Home

• You’ll need a few things:
  – Isolation/quarantine cage
  – Spare towels
  – A “chicken” first aid kit (stocked)
  – A warm, dry, sheltered location
7) Urban Specific Issues!

• Odor:
  – Keep coop dry
  – Keep compost aerobic
  – Give your hens space to roam
  – Use Diatomaceous Earth
• Vermin:
  – Rats, mice, skunks
  • All looking for a free midnight snack.

• Elevate your coop
• Don’t leave pellets outside the coop at night.
• Keep food in rat proof containers (metal trash cans are great)!
• Predators:
  – Raccoons
  – Hawks
  – Domestic Dogs
  – Coyote
• Noise:
  – Don’t keep a rooster.
  – Don’t open your coop at the crack of dawn.
  – A heat insulated coop is a noise insulated coop.
  – Nervous hens are noisy hens.