

Backyard hens

Keeping backyard hens in urban areas can support urban agriculture and local food security. Local governments play a vital role in successfully integrating backyard hens into the community. Detailed bylaws are needed to minimize neighbour complaints, health risks, and wildlife attractants. The B.C. *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, lacks specifics for backyard hens, emphasizing the need for bylaws to address hen welfare.



Consider the following when developing or revising backyard hen bylaws

Zoning

Identify which residential zones will permit the keeping of backyard hens. A person who keeps hens should be a resident of the property where the hens are kept. Hens should only be kept in a fenced backyard, not within a residence or on a balcony or deck.

Registration

Registration of backyard hens with the local government helps with their management. Annual renewal and inspection are recommended.

Hens and roosters

Chickens are social animals and should not be kept on their own. A minimum of two hens is recommended. The limit can be determined by property or lot size. Roosters should not be kept in residential areas due to potential noise disturbance.

Housing

Hens should be housed within a coop and provided access to a secure outdoor run. Hens should not be permitted to roam at large for their safety, to avoid causing a nuisance for neighbours, and to avoid contact with other birds to reduce risk of disease transmission. Hens should be kept inside a secure coop from sunset to sunrise to minimize predation.

The coop and run should be maintained in good repair and sanitary condition and provide enough space for the natural behaviours of the hens. To meet their welfare needs, each hen must have access to a nesting box, raised perch, and an area for dustbathing and foraging.

HELPFUL INFO

Provincial Premises Identification registration is mandatory for all properties keeping poultry and farmed animals in B.C.



Sexing chicks can be challenging, and residents may later realize there is a rooster in their flock. Residents should make arrangements with the hatchery to return any unexpected roosters.

Health

Hen guardians should establish a relationship with a poultry veterinarian to ensure hens receive proper care. Biosecurity guidelines for small flock owners outlined by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency should be followed to minimize disease transmission between backyard hens and commercially-farmed poultry, wildlife and humans.

Manure management

Hen guardians should ensure the timely removal of manure from the coop and run, and follow proper storage, composting, and disposal guidelines. This is essential to minimize odour and fire hazards, protect water quality, and prevent wildlife attraction.

Co-existing with wildlife

Coops and outdoor runs should be enclosed by predator-proof fencing that extends underground and overhead. Electric fencing may be needed. The coop should be constructed, situated, and maintained to protect hens from predators and prevent rodent access. Feed and other wildlife attractants should be stored in air-tight, wildlife-resistant containers.

Sale of products

Hens should be kept for personal use only. To minimize potential disease transmission, eggs, manure, and meat should not be sold.

Slaughter

Hen guardians should have an end-of-life plan for their hens when egg production slows or hens near their end of life. Slaughtering of hens and burial of deceased hens on the property should be prohibited. Hens should be taken to a veterinarian, licensed farm, abattoir, or other facility with the ability to humanely euthanize or slaughter poultry lawfully.

Enforcement

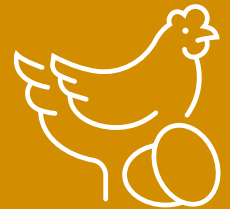
Offences and fines for bylaw violations should be established.

Waste management programs in each local government area may accept manure from backyard hens.



Hen guardians are expected to meet the applicable requirements in the National Farm Animal Care Council's *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Laying Hens*.

The BC SPCA encourages local governments to set a standard of care for hens that exceed these minimum requirements intended for commercial production.



Local governments should consider staff and resource availability to meet the animal control needs of chickens (i.e. animal handling training, appropriate housing for unwanted or abandoned chickens in animal control facilities).

The BC SPCA is available to consult on bylaw development

FOR MODEL BACKYARD HEN BYLAWS VISIT
[SPCA.BC.CA/ANIMALBYLAWS](https://www.sPCA.bc.ca/animalbylaws)

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